

2010

# Emergent Voices from an Orphanage School in Belize, Central America

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*University of Windsor*

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EMERGENT VOICES FROM AN ORPHANAGE SCHOOL IN BELIZE,  
CENTRAL AMERICA

by  
Pamela Raylene Cook

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
2010

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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## ABSTRACT

An attempt is made in this study to gain a better understanding of a non-traditional early learning program in an orphanage school setting, located in Ladyville, Belize, Central America. The teaching staff of Liberty Children's Home (LCH) and Learning Centre (LLC) discovered innovative and strategic ways to differentiate traditional academic ways of early learning. The teaching approaches emulate a theoretical social-constructivist theory, implementing methodologies from Pikler, Montessori and Reggio Emilia. In 1996, a comprehensive literacy survey was conducted in Belize that indicated the functional literacy rate to be approximately 40 percent (Cornerstone, 2007). In addition, it is estimated one person in four in developing countries are illiterate (Terry, 2006). This research site was approved and supported through Liberty Foundation, Ltd., charity of London, England and the Research Ethics Board (REB) from the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. This 17-week qualitative grounded theory (Glaser, 1997) study was conducted on site at LCH and LLC. Responses from the students and staff were documented and interpreted utilizing various anecdotal and observation field notes, journals, interviews, audio/DVD/video recordings and photography. The students and staff responded to the

Belizean ways of implementing early learning curricula in the natural learning environment. The grounded theory study offers a rich description of cultural responses that extend early childhood education further from an institutionalized and international point of view.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all the children, teachers and staff of Liberty Children's Home and Liberty Learning Centre in Ladyville, Belize, Central America. It is through their thoughts and ideas that have made this journey possible.

## MEMORIAL

I dedicate this dissertation in loving memory of my Great Aunt Ilah, my first teacher. She made learning enjoyable and fun.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Academic and University Support

It is with sincere appreciation for encouraging academic support toward this research study. I wish to acknowledge the following: Kara Smith, Faculty of Education, Doctoral Supervisor, University of Windsor; Geri Salinitri, Faculty of Education, University of Windsor; Tina Pugliese, Dramatic Arts, University of Windsor; Jeanne Kentel, Faculty of Education, Brock University; Marlene Maldonado, Faculty of Education, University of Windsor; Yvette Daniel, Faculty of Education, University of Windsor; Dr. Karen Roland, Experiential Learning Specialist, University of Windsor; Dr. Sheila Windle and Dr. Anoop Gupta, Joint PhD in Educational Studies, University of Windsor; Gayle Tait, Graduate Administrative Assistant, University of Windsor; Laurie Barnes, Graduate Student Society, University of Windsor; Karen Bourdeau, Administrative Assistant, Joint PhD in Educational Studies; Dr. Janice Schroeder, California State University; Dr. Nancy Grote, Indiana University; Rebecca Carothers, Cynthia Kumfer, Mary Musson, Laurie Johnson, IVY TECH Community College, Fort Wayne, Indiana. Early Childhood Alliance: Pam Leffers, Kathy Fry-Miller, Risha McCullan, Lisa Welfle, and Melana Rouphey, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

### Family, Friends and Financial Support

It is with heartfelt thankfulness for family and friends who have sacrificed financially and prayerfully supporting me through this endeavor. I wish to acknowledge my parents, Jim and Beverly Cook, Sand Lake, Michigan; additional family members including: Koleen and Mark Schlatter, Kristian Schlatter, Benjamin Schlatter, Laura Schlatter and Adam Schlatter, Leo, Indiana; Clark and Ellen VeltKamp, Chatham, Ontario, Canada; Robert and Carol VeltKamp, Newaygo, Michigan; Mark VeltKamp, Newaygo, Michigan; Margaret Lord, Newaygo, Michigan; Sherry and Kedric and Koeppe, Leo, Indiana; Marsha Hutchinson, Leo, Indiana; Rosemary Duff, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Jennifer Farnsworth, Fort Wayne, Indiana; Irene and Dan Fullmer, and Pam Boik, Grant, Michigan; Thesis editor, Lyndsay Carothers, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

## Research Site Support

It is with sincere gratitude to have been given the distinct privilege and opportunity to conduct early childhood research at Liberty Children's Home (LCH) and Liberty Learning Centre (LLC), in Ladyville, Belize, Central America. I wish to acknowledge Marcelle Delahaye, CEO and Founder of Liberty Foundation, Ltd., a licensed charity of London, England.

## Administration

Liberty Children's Home (LCH), Liberty Learning Centre (LLC)  
Ladyville, Belize, Central America

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Gemma Delahaye, Liberty Foundation, Ltd.

Joanne Rahn, Site Director of LCH and LLC

Dacia Tillett, LLC Preschool Principal

Smirti Sharma, LLC Montessori Directress

Jennifer Price, LLC Administrative Assistant

Natalie Tillett, LCH and LLC Daycare Supervisor

# Caregivers of Liberty Children's Home (LCH)

Deborah Robertson, Custodial Staff and Day Care Staff

Pamela Alfaro, Day Care Staff

Audrey Card, Day Care Staff

Patrick Bowman, Day Care Staff

Audrey Dawson, Day Care Staff

Rosa Gvevara, Day Care Staff

Janires Hernanadez, Day Care Staff

Noreen Passley, Day Care Staff

Carmita Requena, Day Care Staff

Anna Rivera, Day Care Staff

Yolanda Romero, Day Care Staff

Eugene Wallace, Day Care Staff

Sandra Williams, Day Care Staff

## School-age Students, Liberty Learning Centre (LLC)

Rosa, age 9

Rupert, age 6

Zarrina, age 8

Sherwin, age 6

Delroy, age 8

Charles, age 5

Dejhon, age 7

Roy, age 5

Jason, age 7

Brittany, age 5

Jada, age 6

Tyrell, age 5



Teachers of Liberty Learning Centre (LLC)

David Martinovich, School-age Lead Teacher

Sandra Cruz, School-age Co-Teacher

Kari Adler, Art, Drama, Music and Special Education Teacher

Yolanda Wallace, Lead Preschool Teacher

David Bainton, Assistant Preschool Teacher

Emilda Alarcon, Assistant Preschool Teacher

Gladys Perez, 1 Year-Old Teacher

Whitney James, 1 Year-Old Teacher Assistant

Lavita Jacobs, 2 Year-Old Teacher

Karla Cruz, 2 Year-Old Teacher Assistant

Karina Jones, Preschool Teacher Assistant

Shanine Garcia, Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program

Kristy Young, Parents as Teachers (PAT) Program

Staff of Liberty Children's Home (LCH)

Liberty Learning Centre (LLC)

Garth Price, Construction and Physical Grounds Manager

Donald Tillett, Farming and Maintenance

Dorla Crawford, LCH Secretary

Celso Briceno, Grounds Gardener

Stevie Lambey, Grounds Gardener

Alfredo Jose, (In Memory of), LCH Vegetable Gardener

Jose Lopez, Vegetable Gardener

Vilma Pech, Custodial Staff

Chevelee Arnold, Custodial Staff

Nellie Heredia, Custodial Staff

Sonia Harrison, Custodial Staff

Judith Cruz, Food Service

Yolanda Encalada, Food Service

Louise Ramos, Food Service

Everith Sedacy, Laundry Facility

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### Introduction

While attending several national and international academic conferences, I had the privilege of visiting various preschools and diverse orphanages from England, Italy, Romania and Russia. The one school and orphanage that stood out the most, was located in a small village in Ladyville, Belize, Central America. It was at Liberty Children's Home (LCH) and Liberty Learning Centre (LLC), that I became smitten. This school was the first to be approved, in 2006, by the Ministry of Education in Belize.

Belize, like many developing countries in a post-colonial context, has an educational system characterized by an extremely structured and instructionalist (Definitions, p. 10) teaching pedagogy. Thus, I became interested in LLC's non-traditional style of early learning approaches. I wanted to gain a better understanding of a non-traditional early learning environment in an orphanage context.

In this dissertation, I will use the term *traditional learning* to designate a teacher-directed strategy of

instruction. *Non-traditional learning* will refer to a child-centred pedagogy (see "Definition of Terms," entries *behaviourism* and *constructivism*, respectively).

The administration and teachers of LLC utilized non-traditional early learning approaches into the infant, preschool and school-age curricula. These approaches are consistent with a social-constructivist theory to early learning.

#### Background of the Curricula at Liberty

The nature of the non-traditional curricula used by the school and orphanage, I discuss in more depth in Chapter 2, "Literature Review." LCH had essentially implemented Emmi Pikler's methodology of childcare in the infant and toddler program. Pikler was a Hungarian paediatrician who developed, in about 1946, an approach to early childhood education (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; The Pikler Institute, 2004). Her approach is characterized by primary care giving, that is, having a consistent and attendant guardian for the child. She was motivated by her concern about the harmful effects of institutionalization (Definitions, p.10) upon young children (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; The Pikler Institute, 2004).

Maria Montessori, also a physician, developed a method

of early childhood pedagogy. Her methods can be characterized by child-centeredness, that utilize tools and manipulatives she designed.

Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, was named after the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy. In this approach, it is emphasized that the image of the child is seen as competent, creative, and curious, as well as in the Italian socio-cultural context.

The Pikler and Reggio Emilia approach were implemented in various areas of LLC's school curricula program to augment the Montessori Method.

#### Rationale

My rationale for this study is personal. This research is aimed to be a contribution to the literature on early childhood education in an orphanage school setting. Specifically, I hope to provide a rich, detailed grounded theory (Glaser, 1997) study.

Although curriculum reform of international early learning is not new, much of the research in the field of early childhood education either investigates or proposes the implementation of new approaches and programs. Moreover, curriculum reform may not be well suited to the socio-

cultural context of early learning education within a developing country. There is a limited amount of early learning research that has been investigated within developing countries that regard developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for young children (Isabell, 2001).

Furthermore, obtaining responses from students, teachers and staff of a private orphanage school that chooses to implement non-traditional curricula is most appealing. Ellis and Bochner (2000) claimed, "Ethnographies primarily focus on a culture or subcultures that authors use with their own experiences in the culture to reflexively "bend back on self" and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740).

This study opens up spaces for the silent and voiceless. It provides students, teachers and staff opportunities to articulate their lived experiences and offers suggestions for off-setting various layered issues within an institutionalised setting.



## Statement of the Problem

At the most general level, the problem is this: How does a pedagogical strategy designed in the West, fair in a developing country? As Gardner, of the Faculty of Education at Harvard University, cautioned:

It is a mistake to take any approach and assume like a flower you can take it from one soil and put it in another one. That never works. We have to figure out what aspects of that are most important to us and what kind of soil we need to make those grow (cited in Valentine, 2001, p. 15).

In other words, we cannot assume that blended Montessori schools that have proven to be successful in one country and context will necessarily be effective in another setting. Likewise, in the Belizean cultural context with the implementation of blended Montessori schools originating in Italy and throughout Australia, Europe and North America may be well intentioned. Nonetheless, these transplanted approaches could generate undesired and unexpected influences on students, teachers and staff at LLC in Belize. The issue here is the *effectiveness* and the *ways* these approaches are reshaped and transformed within the cultural context of Ladyville, Belize, Central America.

## Research Questions

Based on my initial observations of the teaching and learning interactions at LLC in Belize, we may wonder about the effectiveness and the operationalization of the school's program. Therefore, the main research question for this study is: how do students and staff interact with the implementation of non-traditional early learning curriculum?

By using the term institutionalization in this dissertation, I am referring to the process by which an individual becomes habituated to living in this setting that directly or indirectly accepts and conforms to the institution's control; to the extent that the needs of the institution are seen as more significant than the needs of the individual resident (Kenny, 2007).

More specific questions are:

1. How do students and teachers in an orphanage setting in Belize respond to a blended Montessori and Reggio Emilia approach in their school?
2. How does staff (e.g. administration, care-givers and care-takers) respond to a blended Montessori and Reggio Emilia approach in their school?
3. What are some of the implications for institutions

that are exploring ways of implementing a blended Montessori approach in Early Childhood Educational schooling in Belize?

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the participants of LCH and LLC coped with a blended Montessori and Reggio Emilia approach in an institutionalized context of Belize, Central America. More specifically, through the documentation of the interactions and interviews, I will describe the responses of the participants (i.e. students and staff).

#### Significance of the Study

Although the Montessori Method is popular in Australia, Europe and North America, hardly any studies have specifically considered a blended Montessori approach in an orphanage school in the context of Belize. There has been research conducted regarding preschool curricula and the implementation of a blended Montessori approach into some early childhood programs.

One example of a blended curriculum approach would be the Redleaf School of early learning in Coorparoo, Queensland, Australia. At this school, an educational blend

of Montessori and Reggio Emilia was implemented (Redleaf School, 2008).

Another example from the North American context is the MacDonald Montessori Preschool in St. Paul, Minnesota. This preschool also implemented the Reggio Emilia approach (New Mexico Reggio Emilia Exchange, 2009). In addition, Berkeley Montessori School in Berkeley, California has chosen to implement Montessori, as well as ideas and practices from the Reggio Emilia approach (Berkeley Montessori School, 2008).

The significance of this study, then, is that it contributes to bridging the gap between understanding how western-developed non-traditional pedagogical strategies, fair in traditional teachings of Belize.

In this study, I offer perspectives of cultural transformations drawn from the students and staff at LLC, with a view to better understanding their experimentation with a blended program. This study potentially provides helpful information for future educators working within institutions, orphanages and schools of developing countries as well as, many diverse schools around the world.

In this study, I also hope to have presented useful and

localised knowledge for the administrators and staff of LCH, teachers and students of LLC, and the board members of Liberty Foundation. In addition, the Belizean Ministry of Education and the University of Belize, Early Childhood Program will also hopefully benefit.

### Definition of Terms

Within a qualitative research study, the terms used often form a thread, as Mutua and Swander (2004) put it, “a chord that joins the chapters in this thesis” (p. 14). With the foregoing in view, I turn to discuss key terms used throughout this thesis.

My purpose is not to become involved in debates about the various terms, which takes us beyond the scope of this work. Rather, I aim to offer standard, simple definitions to help guide us through what is my focus (discussed in “Research Questions”). Many of my definitions, then, are drawn from a standard introductory textbook by Woolfolk, Winne, and Perry (2006) *Educational Psychology* used in Canada.

**Atelier** – an art studio within a classroom setting that often becomes the centre of culture and for the construction of projects (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993, 1995).

**Atelierista** - an art teacher that has knowledge of art methods and medium (Edwards, et al., 1993, 1995).

**Behaviourism** - a theory of learning where we emphasize "external events as the cause of changes in observable behaviour" (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2006, p. 535).

**Constructivism** - a "view that emphasizes the active role of the learner in building understanding and making sense of information" (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2006, p. 536).

**Individualization of Instruction** - ways of providing for a student's specific needs, disabilities, and preferences within a learning environment (Morrison, 2007).

**Institutionalization** - the process by which an individual becomes habituated to living in a setting that directly or indirectly accepts and conforms to the institution's control; to the extent that the needs of the institution are seen as more significant than the needs of the individual resident (Kenny, 2007).

**Instructivist** - from the academic perspective, the child is seen as dependent on an adults' instruction which is necessary for academic knowledge and skills achievement (Katz, 2000).

**Non-traditional learning** - a style of pedagogy characterized

by a student-centered approach, where students have an active role in constructing their own understandings. The key difference from traditional learning is that student's prior knowledge is utilized in the learning process (Banks, 2004).

**Operationalization** - the actions that are internalized and can be coordinated through organized methods (Martin, 2006).

**Social-constructivism** - a "view that all knowledge is socially constructed in a community, where people have differential power to control this process" (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2006, p. 543).

**Traditional learning** - the style of pedagogy characterized by a teacher-centered approach, where students are considered empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, so to speak (Banks, 2004).

## Summary and Organization of the Study

This study has been organized into five chapters. In Chapter 1, I offer the context for the dissertation. In Chapter 2, I provide a literature review. In Chapter 3, I describe the research methodology, specifically, an emergent grounded theory (Glaser, 1997) approach.

In Chapter 4, I discuss data analysis and interpretations of this study. In Chapter 5, I present the implications of the study, the significance, including the conclusion and summary; followed by the references, appendices and vita auctoris.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

In this literature review I offer pertinent information that will guide the reader toward a clearer perspective of three educational approaches to early learning.

The epistemological educational pendulum in early learning pedagogy continues to swing back and forth from behaviourism to social-constructivism theoretical frameworks for over the past decade (Cook, 2009). Banks (2004) argued that an approach based on child-initiated activities may not sufficiently support academic development. This may have been the case in the past; however, current studies focus on factors that relate to a child's individual differences (Wardle, 2005) that have been influenced from a wide variety of mechanisms (Martin & Fabes, 2006). Factors may include: transferable skills of communication, collaboration and investigation to strengthen all aspects of early learning through behaviourism or social-constructivism theories (Abbott & Nutbrown, 2001).

Interestingly enough, researchers, Prochner, Cleghorn & Green, (2008), developed a particular comparative and qualitative triple case study conducted in three semi-rural

early childhood education centres in Canada, India and South Africa.

The purpose of this four year study was to provide an understanding of the ways that practice and culture intersect in a semi-rural context. This study focused on the organizational use of materials in preschools as a means to examine the interplay between the indigenous cultural norms. The materials that were used related to the educational trends toward the globalization of early childhood practices (Prochner, Cleghorn & Green, 2008).

Liberty Learning Centre (LLC) was motivated by the methodologies of Emmi Pikler, Maria Montessori, and Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia approach. These approaches were implemented to pedagogically facilitate a rich developmental learning experience for young children living in an orphanage of a developing country.

Therefore, it is anticipated that this information may help the reader understand the theoretical framework of non-traditional curricula chosen at LLC. However, to gain a better understanding of social-constructivism in the pedagogy of early learning, it may be useful to take a deeper look into the roots of both.

Behaviourist movements led thinkers toward a long series of strategies for schools including: objectives,

outcome-based education and teacher performance evaluation systems (Jones and Brader-Araje, 2002). A few behaviourist reformers were theorists such as: B. F. Skinner, Locke, Thorndike, Engelmann, Freud and Watson (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1990; Forman & Kushner, 1997).

Skinner (1905-1990), founder of radical behaviourism was primarily concerned with, "How the environment shapes people's behaviours'" (Martin & Fabes, 2006, p. 38). This theory teaches that behavioural changes occur only when the environment is changed. Learning based theories focus on factors that determine how this behaviour will change in response to everyday occurrences (Martin & Fabes, 2006).

Behaviourism essentially dominated educational thinking until the early 1970's (Codrington, 2004). Later, cognitive processing took precedence which was based upon Bruner and Vygotsky's research indicating that "Learning occurs as the individual interacts with the environment" (Codrington, 2004, p. 178).

Currently, there are some behaviourists that may be concerned with high-stakes examinations as teachers become viewed as tools rather than decision makers (New, 2003). Noddings (1995) suggested, "Formative assessments may be emotional and cognitive, personal and academic" (p. 14). And, to differentiate a child's learning experiences may

also include academics and development. Seemingly, how can teachers implement approaches to diverse learning environments that are conducive to the growth and development of young children, while meeting structured ways of academic bench marks, policies, procedures and standards?

Nevertheless, Cooper (2004) argued that schools in general, have failed to consider policy makers that recognize the significance of the "affective", which has led to oppressive examinations and testing regimes of recent years. Furthermore, findings from neurosciences reaffirm an emphasis placed on the affect through psychological literature, which strongly suggests that all learning is affective in nature (Cooper, 2004). Consequently, the desire of the behaviourist-oriented teacher may consider an agenda that is created and directed by the teacher to meet individual needs of specific learners through change in the learning environment (Cook, 2006).

Social-constructivism or non-traditional frameworks of early learning may be seen as, "strong educational alternatives to traditional education that are sources of inspiration for progressive educational reform" (Edwards, 2002). Social-constructivist approaches allow students opportunities to interpret for themselves what is at stake in the ideological differences that surround them (Giroux,

2004). Hence, the social-constructivist theoretical framework is essentially known to be child-centered. And, for the most part, non-traditional learning strategies have shifted through a variety of contexts with varying successes.

Currently, early childhood educationalists take on an epistemological stance that embraces a social-constructivist based early learning pedagogy through practice and theory. The theoretical framework displays philosophical meanings that include theorists in a diverse context, hinging upon the nature of knowing and the active role of the learner (Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck, & Taylor, 2003; Jones et al., 2002). And, in return, emphasizes the active role of children developing their own understanding of learning (Morrison, 2004).

Katz (2000) suggested one of the major concerns regarding historical squabbling over goals and methods is that both sides in the struggle may overlook curriculum and teaching methods beyond the traditional dichotomy. Katz (2000) believed that:

both sides under-emphasize and undervalue a third option—namely, curriculum and teaching methods that address children's intellectual development as distinct from the *instructivist* emphasis on academic learning

and the *constructivist* emphasis on children's play and self-initiated learning (p. 3).

Jones and Brader-Araje, (2002) suggested that the role of the individual child and the importance of experience learning in essence, is meaning making which is the active role of the learner. Perhaps as behaviourist (Katz, 2000) and social-constructivist methodologies are implemented together, they will in return utilize diverse instructional strategies that will match developmental levels to create a classroom learning environment that meets the individualized learning styles of young children (Cook, 2009).

Nonetheless, there are few studies that have specifically considered non-traditional theoretical curricula implemented in an orphanage school context of a developing country.

#### Pikler

During the beginning stages of operation with Liberty Children's Home (LCH) in 2004, Liberty Foundation began implementing Emmi Pikler's, methodology of child-care. Pikler's approach appeals to programs who seek healthy growth and development of young children that reside in orphanages and institutionalized settings (Liberty Foundation, 2004).

Pikler, a Hungarian pediatrician worked with families

in Budapest, Hungary (The Pikler Institute, 2004). Later in 1946, Pikler founded the Pikler Institute, which became a residential nursery in Lo'czy, Budapest, Hungary. The city of Budapest post-World War II, commissioned Pikler to organize a home for infants and young children who were destitute and needed suitable living arrangements (Association Internationale Pikler, 2006; Mason, 2007).

It was at Lo'czy, that Pikler began a unique style and method approach to childcare and care-giving. Pikler sensitively responded to the social, emotional and exploratory learning needs of young children. Pikler's approach cared for children in a relatively responsive and developmentally attuned manner (Triulzi, 2008). In addition, Pikler discovered an effective means of care-giving young children that is being taught worldwide (Liberty Foundation, 2004; Mason, 2006; The Pikler Institute, 2009).

A few of Pikler's principles to her childcare and care-giving methodology include:

1. The value of independent activity
2. The value of special, favoured, affective relationship and the importance of giving it a form suitable to an institutional setting
3. The necessity of fostering a child's awareness of self and the environment

4. The importance of good physical health as a basis for, and, to some extent, of the proper application of the preceding principles (Liberty Foundation, 2004; The Pikler Institute, 2004).

During those early years of the Institute, Pikler was faced with a particular question regarding her methods of childcare, "How can a group of infants receive individualized attention with such a limited number of caregivers?" Pikler's response to that question became a foundational base for a research approach developed to prevent the damaging effects of institutionalization upon very young children (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; Mason, 2007).

According to Janet Gonzalez-Mena (2004), director of the Pikler/Lo'czy Fund, USA; noted that Margit Hirsch and her team studied 30 children, age's three to nine who spent their infancy within the Pikler Institute and later returned to their birth families. Results of this study indicated that none of the children showed signs of hospitalization which is common to children who spend infancy within an institutionalized setting.

The children at The Pikler Institute showed no emotional disturbances or impaired cognitive functions and they were able to create close relationships (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; Pikler, 1979). Pikler's harmony of care-giving lies in



the idea of what a baby needs for healthy growth and development (Mason, 2007) include:

1. Space and time for free play
2. Supported by sensitive, observant, attention during daily routines
3. Respect for babies as human beings and not objects
4. Trust to develop as they are meant to. (p. 32)

Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1972 completed a similar study that revealed infants residing at the Pikler Institute achieved as well as infants reared in a typical home environment. This study included social employment and emotional adjustments categories. The study showed results of long-term effects of care offered by the Pikler Institute on the development of healthy personal relationships (David & Appell, 2001; Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; Liberty Foundation, 2004).

Child care methodologies from Pikler were also applied in 1990 to assist several orphanages in Romania. At this time, Romanian orphanages were severely over-crowded with mostly abandoned children. A model for infant and preschool children's program was established at the La Motesi in Bucharest, Romania where Pikler's methods were being implemented. Today, programs in Romania are using Pikler

methods and now have been using them as training models through Peace Corps and United Nations International Child Emergency Fund (UNICEF), (Liberty Foundation, 2004).

David and Appell (2001) describe the quality of childcare provided by those caring for young children at the Pikler Institute as; the child is never treated like an object, but as a person who feels, observes, remembers and understands or will understand if given the chance. Care-giving at the Pikler Institute is not done in a hurry or with haste. Although the caregiver is constantly busy, the impression of being in a hurry the care is never interrupted the child has as much time as is needs. Barring an exceptional situation, the nurse always finishes what she has started with a child and respects the individual rhythm of the child in care (David et al., 2001).

Another example of Pikler's approach in childcare methods became apparent during the World Forum in Kuala Lumpur, in May, 2007. Administrators from Indonesia, Israel, Tanzania, Belize, Mexico and the United States all met in Budapest, Hungary at the Pikler Institute to discuss, *"Caring for Children Who Are Orphans"* (Chahin, 2008). The participants from seven countries and five religions, despite their cultural differences shared one commonality; their love for children and their commitment to better

improving a child's quality of life. All of the participants were taught ways to create loving and warm environments for children who live in institutions and where they can also learn to foster a nurturing relationship between the adult and the child (Chahin, 2008).

In observing the research and work at the Pikler Institute, David and Appell (2001) agree that efforts are made for the staff members to involve themselves in authentic but consciously conducted relationships. The adults do not burden the children with their own affectivity and expectations. Pikler's approach respects children and their personalities which stem from an informed understanding of children's individual needs (David & Appell, 2001; Triulzi, 2008).

One of the major characteristics demonstrated at the Pikler Institute is, *consistency*. A routine is established for young children primarily living within an institutional setting. Consistency of a child's routine allows for a sense of *order* which develops a trusting relationship between the adult and the child. The *order* of the child is always respected (Chahin, 2008). Pikler's advice to, "do less" and "let the baby's development unfold naturally", is respectful to young children (Mason, 2007).

The care-givers or "nurses" at the Pikler Institute

interact and are involved with the infants and toddlers. Mason (2007) indicates, "They give cues and then respond and when engaged with an infant or toddler, they dialogue at a gentle slow pace that adapts to the child's rhythm". (p. 40) The nurse is not a substitute parent, but rather a professional that is trained to maintain distance with the child so not to devastate either the child or nurse (David et al., 2001; Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; Triulzi, 2008). Once again, the care-giver or nurse establishes an interactive, cooperative tone with the child. The nurse speaks to the child during bathing, dressing and feeding.

Throughout the bodily care of young children, the nurse continues to be attentive to the timing and gestures of care, cooperating with the infant at every move. Through self-initiated bodily communication, the nurse maintains a trust with the infant and models responsive cooperation (David et al., 2001; Triulzi, 2008). Moreover, through the ways of this approach the caregiver instills harmony between the movements of the child and those of the nurse. This method essentially reinforces the gentleness, which is the goal of the established Pikler way to interact. In this particular way, it provides a type of security with the primary relationship (with appointed nurses) in order to develop the "security to be independent" (Petrie & Owen,

2005, p. 62), which is the primary goal in the rearing of infants at the Pikler Institute (Triulzi, 2008). Infants at the Pikler Institute in Budapest display grace and confidence when they move even when they are older (Triulzi, 2008).

Pikler infants and toddlers learn to turn on their belly, creep, roll, sit, stand and walk. The child essentially is not only learning movements but also *how* to learn. The infant or toddler learns to do work on their own, to be interested, to try out, and to experiment. Infants and toddlers learn to overcome difficulties and to know the joy and satisfaction which is derived from their success, the result of patience and persistence (Falk & Roche, 1994, p.12; Mason, 2007; Triulzi, 2008).

Janet Gonzalez (2004), director of the Pikler/Lo'czy Fund, USA, shares her observation of a child at The Pikler Institute, performing duties:

I was surprised to see a 17-month-old performing a duty as a designated helper at lunch. He knew the exact routine and performed admirable-bringing out the little stools, setting the table, and cleaning up afterward. For his final duty he put all the dirty bibs into a small basket and proudly followed the nurse out the door to another part of the house to put everything

away. It was clear that he considered what he was doing an honor, not a chore (p. 2).

One of Pikler's protégés, Hungarian-born Magda Gerber, transformed Pikler's work and made it accessible to parents in the United States. Magda Gerber, with pediatrician, Dr. Tom Forrester, established a program in 1978, *Resources for Infant Educators* (RIE) in Los Angeles, California. The intent of RIE was to offer training to those working with infants and toddlers in out-of-family care and guidance classes for parents (Petrie & Owen, 2005). The RIE program also offered care-givers; parents and teachers classes based upon Pikler's methods of childcare (Mason, 2006).

The purpose of RIE was to create a safe, quiet environment, slowing down, paying attention, and allowing infants to move and play in their own way . . . a contradiction to the prevailing attitude in the U.S. society. In reflecting on her work with Dr. Pikler, Magda Gerber stated at that time, "I have felt sometimes like the bridge between Dr. Pikler and American society" (Gerber, 1998, p. 189).

While Pikler's work was directed toward the care of children in orphanages in Budapest, Hungary; Gerber's work (RIE) had taken another turn toward several directions in the United States (Triulzi, 2008). One of the dominant

reasons for teaching RIE principles was to focus on the parent-infant groups in order to support parents in their task of parenting infants and toddlers.

In the teachings of RIE principles, like those techniques of Pikler, Magda Gerber did not explicitly coach or train parents, rather she modeled for them, as she hoped they would then feel encouraged to model for their infants and toddlers, rather than instruct them (Triulzi, 2008). Magda often said, "Put the emphasis on *learning*, not on *teaching*" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004, p. 3).

In conclusion, Pikler's approach in childcare and caregiving methods may be summarized with the following remarks from Anna Tardos, the daughter of Emmi Pikler. Anna is living today and is currently director of; The Pikler Institute. Tardos commented to Chahin (2008):

Hands constitute the infant's first connection with the world. Hands pick her up, lay her down, wash and dress her, and even feed her. What a different picture of the world an infant receives when quiet, patient, careful, yet secure and resolute hands take care of her - and how the world seems when these hands are impatient, rough, or hasty, unquiet and nervous. In the beginning hands are everything for an infant. The

hands are the person, the world.” (p. 41)

The International Emmi Pikler Foundation of the Pikler/Lo'czy Fund, are Directors from Argentina, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. The Pikler Institute provides professional development seminars for administrators, educators, parents, teachers and child care providers throughout the world (The Pikler Institute, 2004).

#### Montessori

Principles from Maria Montessori's educational methodologies were researched and implemented in the second year of LLC, preschool and school-age school programs. The purpose of the Montessori approach for LLC was to promote the fullest potential of early learning experiences for the whole child (Liberty Foundation, 2004).

In Montessori views, a child's development does not always progress in one continuous inclined plane, the implication of that model to children as a small adult, and development proceeds in a linear or constant fashion from birth to maturity (Crain, 2000).

Beverly Kovach (2004), Montessori instructor from the American Montessori Society (AMS) training center comments on how Pikler's philosophy influences Montessori practitioners. Kovach understands “to manipulate children's



movement less and allow natural development to occur unaided by contraptions is a great lesson to underscore . . . we can all learn a lot from babies if we would just give them, 'time'" (p. 7). To confirm Kovach's statement with Maria Montessori's philosophy, Magda Gerber, Emmi Pikler's protégé' once said, "In time, not on time." (Cited in Gonzalez-Mena, 2004, p. 3)

In 1896, Maria Montessori (1870-1952), was the first female, Italian physician from Italy to receive a degree of Doctor of Medicine (Standing, 1959, p. 9). It was later in her medical career, after observing patients in Rome at the Psychiatric Clinic; Montessori became interested in educational philosophies. Montessori's educational approach and methods were one of few creative modern early educational theorists. Montessori's approach influenced some of the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (Mooney, 2006; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000; Standing, 1959). Piaget (1939) thought that Montessorian pedagogy constituted a particular stage in the history of progressive education (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1990).

By 1908, Montessori's name and work was famous worldwide and by 1913; there were almost 100 schools in America adapting Montessori methodologies. Her methods were so popular that Montessori was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in three years, 1949, 1950 and 1951. It was as if,

Maria Montessori had discovered, "a new world" (Standing, 1959, p. 17), and a new way of learning.

As a result of Montessori's educational approach in 1907-1908, a new landmark in Montessori's educational career was formulated. This was to be her first experience with children housing conditions of a lower income status in San Lorenzo quarter, Rome, Italy. The first class, *Casa dei Bambini*, or "Children's House", served children age's three through six (Mooney, 2006; Lillard, 2005; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000; Standing, 1959). Montessori once said, ". . . I was like foolish Aladdin, who, without knowing it, had in his hand a key that would open hidden treasure" (Cited in Standing, 1959, p. 21). In fact, it was the materials that were to prove the "Aladdin's Lamp" and opened up to her wondering eyes that concealed those treasures within. Standing (1959) commented, "For the children chose them and worked with them *spontaneously*" (p. 21).

Hence, Montessori's educational method was scientific, and an approach that had simply evolved from Montessori's pattern of consistent observation and study of young children working in the environment (Driscoll et al., 2005). Montessori had essentially discovered, "a world within - within the soul of the child" (Standing, 1959, p. 17); a philosophy that lends itself to a learning environment which

demonstrates great respect for children.

Joanne Rahn, director of Liberty Children's Home, believed through her own observations of children in Belize, "It's not about pink towers and golden beads [Montessori's manipulatives], it's about knowing you will get an opportunity to be heard and your words will be respected", just as Montessori believed in children, as well.

According to Mooney (2006), Montessori used the word "cheerful" (Standing, 1959, p. 27) to describe spaces that were well planned for children. It shows a unique capacity that a young child is able to assimilate, or to take in one's own surroundings. This offers a child a chance to absorb each new experience in a powerful and direct way through the process of absorption; the mind itself is formed. Thus, the child directly assimilates the physical and social environment to develop mental powers (Roopnarine et al., 2000).

Montessori's thoughts of an appropriate learning space needed to provide: authentic tools that work, materials that are accessible for children to organized equipment, as well as beauty and order created in the environment. Consequently, the learning environment must reflect an orderly space that promotes a child's effort of being a critical thinker and form of independence (Mooney, 2006).

In addition, Edwards (2002) thought of the learning environment based upon Montessori's beliefs that children are intrigued through the implementation of child initiated activities; handmade wooden manipulatives and other tools. This would allow children many opportunities to explore learning in a naturalistic setting. The natural learning environment may include:

1. A prepared environment that invites learning
2. Children self-direct their learning
3. Sensory materials that promote learning
4. Multiage learning groups
5. Manipulating learning tools and materials
6. Utilizing open-ended learning spaces
7. Learning through the child's senses

Montessori (1949) endorsed her theories by saying, "Our apparatus for educating the senses offers the child a key to guide his exploration of the world" (pp. 182-83). And, Montessori's teachings have essentially taught teachers to be open-minded and observe spontaneous interests in children's work. Their tasks would emulate independence showing concentration and a sense of fulfillment (Crain, 2000). Edwards (2002) thought a competent Montessorian teacher must involve:

1. A child's interests and needs
2. Promote a safe learning environment
3. Direct children unobtrusively
4. Analyze, observe and document
5. Provide appropriate manipulative materials
6. Understand the nature and purpose of didactic materials
7. Communicate regularly with adults

Courses developed by Montessori have touched approximately four to five thousand teachers (Standing, 1959, p. 55), consisting of participants ranging from 30 to 40 nationalities, representing countries from around the world. A few of the Montessori training sites include: London, Rome, Milan, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, Nice, San Francisco, Innsbruck, Barcelona, Ceylon, Madras, and Karachi.

During World War II era, under Mussolini's regime of Fascism was well underway in 1939, and for Montessori as an Italian, was regarded an enemy alien. Interestingly enough, Montessori flew to India and began conducting teacher training courses in Madras, essentially offering additional courses in Ahmadabad, Adyar, Kodaikanal and Kashmir. Hence, in 1944, Montessori received recognition from the Government in India (Standing, 1959, p.50).

In Montessori programs today, there are schools that have implemented the approach in both private and public sectors and are admired throughout the world. However, there are also schools in continents such as: Australia, Europe and North America where few studies have specifically considered a type of "blended Montessori" approach.

Even so, Montessori began her educational career working with a wide range of young children from lower socio-economic conditions (Mooney, 2006; Lillard, 2005; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000 & Standing, 1959). And, interestingly enough, it has been confirmed in Lillard's (2005), *Science behind the Genius*, who discovered that children attending an inner city Montessori school had superior outcomes relative to a sample of Montessori applicants who, because of a random lottery, attended other schools that were not Montessori. By the end of kindergarten, the Montessori children performed better on standardized tests of reading and math, engaged in more positive interaction on the playground and showed more advanced social cognition and executive control. The children also showed more concern for fairness and justice. At the end of elementary school, the Montessori children wrote creative essays with more complex sentence structures, selected positive responses to social dilemmas, and reported

feeling a sense of community at their school.

Throughout this research, I have not located any studies that confirm a basic Montessori or blended approach in an orphanage school like that of LLC and, in the context of a developing country such as; Belize, Central America. There has only been evidence and research regarding preschool curricula and the implementation of a blended Montessori approach into early childhood programs in Australia and North America.

One example of a blended curriculum approach would be from a small rural community school in Queensland, Australia (January, 2006). This program shared a vision that included the implementation and elements of the Montessori, Reggio Emilia and Waldorf philosophies; embracing a holistic and child-led curriculum (Jones, 2006). The Redleaf School of early learning in Coorparoo; also of Queensland, Australia, chose an educational blend of Montessori and Reggio Emilia within a traditional classroom learning environment (Redleaf School, 2008).

Another example, from the North American sector is the MacDonald Montessori Preschool in St. Paul, Minnesota. This preschool has been in existence for 19 years and in that time period, the school began to expand their horizons and was inspired to implement the Reggio Emilia approach (New

Mexico Reggio Emilia Exchange, 2009).

In addition, Berkeley Montessori School in Berkeley, California, also located in the United States, serves a variety of educational needs for preschool, kindergarten and elementary age children through the middle school years. Berkeley chose the Montessori approach and also implements ideas and practices from the Reggio Emilia inspired approach; to all the school's programs (Berkeley Montessori School, 2008).

There are also organizations that continue working with Montessori based schools on behalf of the Montessori approach and young children around the world including: the North American Montessori Teachers' Association (NAMTA), International Montessori Society (IMS) and the International Montessori Council (IMC). A recent Press Release indicated:

The United Nations, through its Goals for the Millennium, recognizes the important value of a Montessori education. The UN Goals for the Millennium include "Peace through education", and one goal is to help address the needs of children in developing countries. The goal is to go beyond providing food or clothing, but, in the Montessori tradition, "feeding the entire child" by providing food for the mind as



well as the body (North American Montessori Teachers' Association, 2008).

The Montessori Initiative is an important participant in the Goals for the Millennium project, and in association with, XL-Generation Foundation, Bid Give International, and M: The Magazine for Montessori Families. The support of other foundations and corporate underwriters develop Montessori based learning and sports centres in the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Morocco (North American Montessori Teachers' Association, 2008).

#### Reggio Emilia

During the second year at Liberty, the administration, and teachers began to explore ways for the Reggio Emilia approach to be implemented into the preschool and school-age programs at LLC. The teachers were in agreement that both approaches would create a strong blending together (J. Rahn, personal communication, February 20, 2006).

The Reggio Emilia approach has attracted early childhood educationalists significantly throughout the world and for over a decade. This approach brings an increasingly new source of ideas from more than 40 countries including: Brazil, Mexico, Philippines and South Africa, which have

explored and possibly implemented the approach (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1995, 1998; New, 2003).

The story of the Reggio Emilia approach initially began with the formulation originating out of the ruins of post-World War II, 1945 rubble in Northern, Reggio Emilia, Italy. During that time, it has been told that Italian parents of young children living in the surrounding areas of the city became disenchanted with the early learning educational systems. Loris Malaguzzi, Italian educator and teacher began to encourage these disgruntled parents and together founded the "Reggio Emilia" approach to early learning (Driscoll, & Nagel, 2005; Edwards, et al., 1993, 1995, 1998).

Theorists who were instrumental in guiding Loris Malaguzzi's desire toward the development of this approach were (Driscoll et al., 2005) the Italian traditions of Rosa Agazzi and Maria Montessori (Edward et al., 1995). In addition, Vygotsky's work of symbolic language in cognition, Piaget, Dewey's educational philosophy and also the Play-Based Learning approaches from the British Infant Schools in the early 1970's (New, 2003).

Moreover, the Reggio Emilia approach lends itself to a social-constructivist approach to early learning pedagogies

and encourages young children to create symbolic representations from their own thoughts and ideas by providing them with diverse materials and media (Edwards et al., 1995 & Fraser, 2000).

Malaguzzi, (1997) as a social-constructivist, strongly believed the, "image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected to adults and children" (Cited in Valentine, 2001; p. 4). Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck and Taylor (2003) suggested, "A constructivist teacher recognizes the importance and what imitations the child needs rather than embracing social knowledge as the total curriculum" (p. 47).

Consequently, the approach is a methodology that provokes the teacher and the child from a researcher's interpretation and acquires an understanding of a child's developmental change through a diverse context of culture and setting (Cook, 2006).

New (2003) agreed that the Reggio Emilia approach has much to contribute to make changes more desirable, "Such changes would go a long way toward contributing to a more dynamic culture of education as envisioned by Bruner (1996); living up to John Dewey's faith in schools as a catalyst for societal change" (p. 37). Bruner (Cited in Valentine, 2001)

supported and acknowledged, "A *Reggio* preschool is a special kind of place, one in which young human beings are invited to grow in mind, in sensibility and in belonging to a broader community" (p. 11). New (2003) views the Reggio Emilia approach as:

1. The role, and transformation of the classroom learning environment in children's learning
2. Long-term curriculum projects promote inquiry among children and teachers
3. Partnerships created with others including a collaboration in the learning process
4. Documentation for observation, research and assessments;
5. *Hundred Languages of Children* - children's multiple means of expression and understanding. (Edwards et al., p. 35)

Valentine (2001) refers to the *Reggio Emilia* Approach as:

1. The Image of the child - a conceptualization of the image of the child as capable and competent
2. The expressive arts in the preschool
3. *Progettazione* (Projects) creating flexible plans for further exploration of ideas and the design of a follow-through approach with the collaboration of

children and a larger community

4. Community and Relationships
5. Environment - considered third teacher, provides a variety of materials and objects to guide a child's learning experiences
6. Teachers as learners and researchers (Edwards, et al., 1998, p. 276; Fraser, 2000; Valentine, 2001, p. 4).

As it appears, the Reggio Emilia approach may seem too idealistic and unrealistic for some children and for some cultures; however, the approach shares a theoretical design from Bruner's socio-cultural perspectives on education (Edwards et al., 1995; Valentine, 2001).

Loris Malaguzzi suggested in, *The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards, et al., 1993, 1995, 1998), "The socially mediated construction of knowledge is perhaps the most distinctive of Reggio Emilia's interpretation of teacher as *learner* and *researcher*" (Edwards et al., p. 276). Children that learn in this type learning environment are heard and observed so teachers are able to adjust the curricula and their instructional strategies to meet a child's individual learning style (Edwards, et al., 1995; Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2003).

For example, as children acquire more language, they

may also develop new patterns of social interaction as they continue cognitive development to problem solve (Hull, Goldhaber & Capone, 2002). In this type of learning environment, teachers are also encouraged to transform activities in the environment to co-construct knowledge together (Cook, 2006).

Teachers of the Reggio Emilia preschools have described the approach of early learning as the pedagogy of "relationships" (cited in Valentine, 2001). Unlike other pedagogies, Loris Malaguzzi (cited in Valentine, 2001) believed that the image of the child:

no longer considered them as isolated and egocentric, does not only see them as engaged in action with objects, not emphasize only the cognitive aspects, does not belittle feelings or what is not logical and does not consider with ambiguity the role of the reflective domain. Instead our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and most of all connected to adults and children (p. 4).

During the spring of 2001 and 2002, I was given the opportunity to participate in two separate Study Tours to Reggio Emilia, Italy. My thoughts of the city were nestled in a rich culture of architecture, beauty, family roots and spiritual renewal. Moreover, a city of significant

historical impact created an even greater appreciation toward a methodology that provided an approach that mirrors social-constructivism (Cook, 2006).

This was noteworthy for me to experience the social-constructivist Theory; an ontological reality as I witnessed young children from six months to six years constructing projects above their own age level of development. This interaction was similar to a "dance", adults and children, back and forth, probing and provoking, using methods of open-ended inquiry (Cook, 2006). I wondered perhaps if this approach evolved organically from the rich artistic venue around it.

While visiting several of the preschools around the city of Reggio Emilia, I began to immerse myself in this angelic and tranquil environment. I listened to children giggle as fountains bubbled over with water running through tiny pebbles and stones. I watched children run through tall grasses and play in lush green gardens filled with many hues of colour.

It was like I had become an invisible spectator while observing children explore in classrooms with walls that were designed to look like very large windows. These walls were referred to as "window walls" (Edwards, et al., 1993),

which brought an expansive amount of natural light into the learning environment.

I observed several children using their small muscle coordination to manipulate Lego's, wooden building blocks and puzzles. Materials of small coloured glass pieces and many different plastic objects of recyclable items were being used to design projects. Children also created clay and wire sculptures and manipulated with glue, paper and paint mediums.

These observations allowed me to see children utilizing their own learning spaces as a method to construct knowledge in an environment that had been intrinsically designed and prepared to help them specifically, cognitively problem-solve (Cook, 2006).

There is much to be said of the Reggio Emilia approach to early learning with the highest regard of respect for young children demonstrated in the preschools throughout the community of Reggio Emilia, Italy. This approach ultimately allows children the freedom to explore and thrive educationally in an open-learning concept (Edwards, et al., 1993, 1995, 1998).

From my observations of the preschools in Reggio Emilia, I was inspired by Loris Malaguzzi (Fraser, 2000), as he claimed, "The Reggio Emilia approach produces for the



adults, but above all for the children, a feeling of belonging in a world that is alive, welcoming and authentic" (p. 1).

The "Reggio Children" organization developed in 1994 has created a global community of partnerships that considers public and private organizations and manages the pedagogical and cultural exchanges between the municipal early childhood services for teachers and researchers throughout the world.

In the past, Reggio Children has only worked with several cooperation projects; non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and professional development opportunities for educators working in developing countries. (P. Ricco, International Exchanges, personal communication, April 13, 2006).

Furthermore, this information becomes extremely significant to this particular study, for it would indicate that Liberty Learning Centre is not only the first non-traditional school in Belize, Central America; rather, LLC is the first non-traditional school to have chosen "blended" curricula of Pikler, Montessori and Reggio Emilia in a developing country.

As I reminisce from this point of my past learning of the Reggio Emilia approach and continue further research, I

find no attempts toward studies that have implemented the Reggio Emilia approach in an orphanage school context of a developing country. Therefore, as I continue this journey into the next chapter it compels me to continue looking through the lens of non-traditional learning. I am provoked; for I believe there is one true commonality that is woven throughout these three approaches, which can be summed up as: respect for children.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

In this section, I discuss grounded theory (Glaser, 1997). I also address specific topics in this study including: qualitative research, the research site, research participants, approach, collection and management of data, data analysis, research materials, audio recordings, DVD/video tape recordings, photography, pilot study, procedures, locating myself in the study and a summary.

#### Research Design: Grounded Theory

This research design is composed of study that uses a classic qualitative grounded theory (Glaser, 1997) method. It regards Liberty Foundation, private children's home and orphanage school, utilizing an ethnographic and "reflexive" style (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The research design was an appropriate method, chosen to make sense of the voluminous amount of data collected (Grote, 2001).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) refer to grounded theory, as a qualitative research study that "served at the front of the qualitative revolution" (p. 9). This was a pivotal point in the history of qualitative research in the social

sciences when, Glaser and Strauss (1967) completed *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. As a result, Glaser and Strauss (1967) defended qualitative grounded theory research to consist of a systematic inductive guideline for collecting and analyzing data; to design a theoretical framework which explains the data that has been collected (Charmaz, 1994).

Critics have argued that a study in grounded theory by nature of the methods and its limitations may be insufficient to respect the interviewees and their stories (Riessman, 1990). Richardson (1994) found a grounded theory analysis to be alienating and turned to literary forms. Consequently, criticisms imply that grounded theory methods gloss over meanings in the respondents' stories (Charmaz, 1994). Charmaz (1994), suggested, "A constructivist approach to grounded theory reaffirms studying people in their natural settings" (p. 510).

Grounded theory essentially provides a systematic analysis approach to an ethnographic style as it consists of a set of open-ended strategies. A constructivist grounded theory approach recognizes categories, concepts, and theoretical levels of an analysis, as questions emerge from the researcher's interactions and data is collected from the field.

In short, the narrowing of inquiries and the nature of the concepts and categories included with the constructed theoretical framework mirror how the researcher will shape the collected data (Charmaz, 1994). Shank (2002) refers to the researcher as a participant and observer in the lives of the peoples. On the other hand, Creswell (2002, p. 487) explains the position of an *ethnographic* researcher:

1. Studies issues of power, empowerment, inequality, equality, dominance, repression, hegemony, and victimization.
2. Is self-conscious about the interpretations that reflect history and culture.
3. Collaborates and actively participates with the participants.
4. Uses care in entering and leaving a site and reciprocates by giving back to the peoples studied.

Ethnographic studies include a wide range of research and writing approaches which connect the *personal* to the *cultural* (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739; Ellis, 2004). Richardson (2000) commented, "Ethnographies are highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories

about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural" (p. 931). In addition, an ethnographic approach affirms but also challenges to articulate, honestly and openly an impact on the research process in a way that is positive and enabling rather than negative and disabling.

Consequently, an ethnographic study allows the researcher to reflect and revisit the way that data is collected and presented; so as to respect and gain a better understanding of the native culture (Creswell, 2002). In this way, LCH and LLC learning environments are studied and described.

Shank (2002) refers to ethnographic research as a way to see the world from a cultural perspective and to understand the meanings of rituals, cultural artifacts and activities. The researcher reviews the writings from a perspective of interpreting sensitivity to poetics which have undoubtedly changed the nature of ethnographic writings (Brady, 2000).

As an ethnographic and grounded theory researcher, there were many ways that data was to be collected. Essentially, the culture came first, as the peoples of the culture *effectively* and *reflexively* changed the views of research. Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis (2008) suggested:

Writing one's self into a text depends on a certain level of honesty to *self-implicate*. One's personal feelings are a reaction to the situation one is in and with whom one is engaging. (p. 368)

Therefore, the active participation of the researcher required a humble disposition and the process became a *self-reflexive* experience toward the inquiry, interviews and observations obtained (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Smith, 1999). Saukko (2000) concurred: "Self-reflexive awareness of mediation, thus, is the most characteristic criterion for good or valid research in the paradigm" (p. 350), of a grounded theory methodology.

The reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the participants offers an approach that is respectful to the different types of inquiries. Freire (2002) concurred, "The investigation itself must be based on *reciprocity* of action" (p. 107). Noddings (1995) agreed, "Confirm *others* bring out the best in them" (p. 144). And, Howard (1996) also agreed to, "The concept of reciprocity is important in understanding exchange and social relationships in all societies . . . and can reflect the degree of social closeness between the partners in exchange" (p. 111).

As the responses were obtained from the participants which included: students and staff (e.g. administration,

care-givers and care-takers), knowledge was shared as caring was demonstrated in the research. The grounded theory approach essentially is a way of giving back to the peoples of the culture (Smith, 1999; Creswell, 2002). Moreover, Noddings (1995) agreed, "To develop the capacity to care, one must engage in care-giving activities" (Tappan, 1998, p. 30).

### Qualitative Research

Qualitative research of the social sciences attempt to portray an understanding of the social world, based upon ideas, beliefs, and theories; often resulting in social issues in the wider framework of decolonization, self-determination and social justice (Smith, 1999). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) concurred, "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 3). Smith (1999) also claims that qualitative research is:

A different epistemological tradition which frames the way we see the world, the way we organize ourselves in it, the questions we ask and the solutions which we seek. It is a way of abstracting knowledge, reflecting on it, engaging with it, taking it for granted sometimes, making assumptions based upon it, and at



times engaging in the way it has been and is being constructed. (p. 188)

Looking at research from the inside becomes reflexive in nature, like that of a rubber band being stretched to the fullest and then back again. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) said; "Self-reflexive validity analyses how social discourse shapes or mediate experiences" (p. 188).

According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Associate Professor in Education and Director of the International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Education, University of Auckland, New Zealand, suggested, "Research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise, but an activity that has something at stake that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (p. 5). This investigation was a way to engage and participate in a study that would help to provide a better understanding of non-traditional curricula, while at the same time maintaining a respectful distance from the Belizean culture.

These intentions align well with Freire (1995) who said, "The inquiries and listening to stories from the peoples, provide ways to encourage the culture, to be masters of their thinking . . . it serves to introduce the

pedagogy of the oppressed, in the elaboration of which the oppressed must participate" (Freire, 1995, p. 124).

Smith (1999) cautions, when working in cross-cultural or cross-national work in neo-colonial settings may present ethical and methodological dilemmas. This may occur particularly when there is a conscious attempt to decolonize the research, as the process of the study begins to decolonize thoughts and ideas toward researching methodologies.

#### The Research Site

Liberty Foundation is a registered charity in the United Kingdom and is a certified non-government organization (NGO) of Belize, Central America. Marcelle Delahaye, CEO and founder of Liberty Foundation, commented, "As an NGO which strives to help the most vulnerable, we have a responsibility to ensure a more effective and collaborative delivery of services to the most vulnerable in Belize" (Liberty Foundation, 2004; M. Delahaye, personal communication, September 17, 2007).

Liberty Foundation works closely with the Belizean Human Services Department in the placement of children in surrounding areas and other countries (e.g. Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras) in close proximity to Belize. The aim of Liberty Foundation is to prevent harmful effects of

institutionalization on children who are placed in residential care and raised until their future is satisfactorily secured (Liberty Foundation, 2004).

The campus-style facility is purposeful and provides a functional children's' home and private school. At present, LCH is prepared to care for approximately 45 residents from infants to teenage children that have become abandoned, abused, neglected or orphaned in the Ladyville, Belize City and surrounding areas.

Endeavours of LCH and LLC were to see this part of the world from a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic perspective. A conceptualization and understanding unfolds as meanings of the rituals, cultural artefacts and activities of the Belizean culture become clear. Delpit (2005) suggested:

By seeking out those whose perspectives differ most, by learning to give their words complete attention, by understanding one's own power even if that power stems merely from being in the majority, by being unafraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness. (p. 17)

The children's home and learning centre arrange for food, housing and instruction for the children that live

full-time on the premises. The organization invests in children fully, as they are to be seen as individuals who eventually grow into valuable members of society (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004; Liberty Foundation, 2004).

Liberty Foundation's staff firmly believed in a nurturing and respectful environment, where a child is able to excel and flourish, despite having a disadvantaged start to life (Liberty Foundation, 2004). Joanne Rahn, Director of LCH and LLC confirmed, "The peace and respect they are given reflects in their health and attitude" (J. Rahn, personal communication, September 19, 2006).

#### Research Participants

The ethnic backgrounds and groups of the students, teachers and staff of LCH and LLC represent Belizean, British, Chinese, European, Garifuna, Mesitzo, Mayan, Mexican and Spanish descent, while the administration and teachers originate from Belize, the United Kingdom and the United States. The ages of the children living at LCH, range from a few weeks old to nine years, as more boys than girls dominate the orphanage.

The primary language spoken in Belize is English. Chinese, Creole (French dialect) Garifuna, Spanish and Mayan

languages were also spoken (Liberty Foundation, 2004). The participants for this study were selected by using three separate groups including: LLC school-age students, two co-teachers and LCH staff represented by the administration and staff including: Liberty Foundation CEO, LCH Director, a local board member, school principal, art studio teacher and preschool teachers. The staff included: LCH and LLC caregiving and caretaking staff. Perspectives from the staff members hoped to shed light on the operationalization of the children's home and school.

To begin the documenting procedures, and throughout this thesis, I will refer to myself as, "Miss Pamela" and the participants as, "Miss, Mr. or Teacher", out of respect to the Belizean culture and their way of communicating.

The participants involved in this study were 12 ethnically diverse Belizean school-age students, ranging from five to nine years of age (four females and eight males). The school-age teachers included: one European male lead teacher from the United States. The educational background of this teacher was approximately ten years of teaching experience working with non-traditional learning approaches and an acquired knowledge of the Montessori approach.

The co-teacher, a female Belizean teacher was also local to the Ladyville community. Her educational background originated from a traditional Belizean education, without previous knowledge of the Montessori approach. The implementation of the Reggio Emilia approach to LLC was new to both teachers (Appendices I-J).

The administration that represented LCH and LLC included: Director, school board member, school principal, Montessori Directress, atelierista, preschool teachers, and the office secretary. This staff originated from Belize, the United Kingdom and the United States. The remaining staff originated from Belize and included: child care-givers, care-takers, cooks, custodial, gardeners, laundry, maintenance and physical grounds; which all took part in the research study (Appendices K-M).

#### A Grounded Theory Approach

For this study, there was a commitment toward conducting a careful and thorough grounded theory investigation. It was necessary to collect rich and informative data from the study participants (Grote, 2001). Data was collected daily from LCH students and staff (e.g. administration, teachers, caregivers and caretakers). This

approach provided a way to look at the information from more than one perspective (Grote, 2001).

The approach was accomplished through the documentations of a triple triangulation method of students, teachers and staff. The responses were obtained from a blended non-traditional curriculum approach including: Pikler, Montessori and Reggio Emilia in an orphanage campus setting and school learning environment context (Appendix O).

The methods of documenting and recording began with daily field notes of the participants when making participant inquiries and member checks regarding the observations. This consisted of students, teachers, administration and staff thoughts and ideas of working in a non-traditional learning environment.

The documentation included: observations, detailed anecdotal field notes, personal member checks, 5 - 15 minute or extended interviews and small group interview sessions to provide a rich description of the learning centre and its instructional teaching approaches (Appendix O).

Documentations and observations were taken daily at LLC, Monday through Friday mornings from 9:00am to 12:00pm.

On several occasions, specific interviews were held during school lunch time (12:00-1:00pm), as group sessions were also scheduled with school-age students, teachers, administration and staff members. Other interviews and observations occurred later in the afternoon (1:00-5:00pm) and evening while the afternoon and evening staff prepared the evening tea (6:00-7:00pm). The evening care-givers bathed the children, played games and read bedtime stories (7:00-8:00pm), while some of the interviews took place at these times (Appendix P).

There were also several weekends during special events that were scheduled which offered extra opportunities for anecdotal notes, field journals, memo note taking along with many observations of the students, teachers and staff. These special events included: a fieldtrip to the Belizean Zoo and Old Belize Museum, a local fish aquarium fieldtrip, kite flying walk by the sea and several walks to the local neighbourhood Park that was newly refurbished for the community of Ladyville, through Liberty Foundation (Appendix P).

#### Collection and Management of Data

This study consisted of a 17-week investigation during the months of February to June 2007. Charmaz (1994) referred



to qualitative grounded theory research as a collection of rich data from multiple sources, "Observations, conversations, formal interviews, auto-biographies, public records, organizational reports, respondents' diaries and journals, and our own tape-recorded reflections" (p. 514).

All through this research process, from a grounded theorist perspective, ways were found to develop analytic interpretations of the data to further focus on the data collection which was used to inform and refine the theoretical analyses (Charmaz, 1994).

### Data Analysis

The data analysis of this project was based upon the researcher as an active participant utilizing an inductive process of recording and observing for this qualitative study. The grounded theory researcher elucidated school-age students, teachers, administration and staff who worked at LCH and LLC. The analysis of the participants' thoughts and ideas regarding the blended school's non-traditional curriculum program was observed; documented and interpreted daily.

The method of data analysis proceeded with a series of stages. Bartlett and Payne (1995) suggested ten phases which

include:

1. Collecting data
2. Transcribing data
3. Developing categories
4. Saturating categories
5. Providing abstract definitions
6. Theoretical sampling
7. Axial coding
8. Integrating theory
9. Grounding the theory
10. Filling in the gaps (Charmaz, 1994).

While analysing data, there was consistency in listening and rereading the transcripts to make sense of the data collected. A search for inter-related themes of the categories, in return, provided rich descriptions and interpretations of the research (Grote, 2001). Charmaz (1994), suggested, "A grounded theory is durable because it accounts for variation; it is flexible because researchers can modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered" (p. 511).

The research from this study begins to fill the gap for future research regarding early childhood education both institutionally and internationally. This research provides perspectives from students and staff of a non-traditional blended curriculum approach that was implemented in an institutionalized context of a developing country. The raw data was collected using equipment and materials as listed within the "research materials" section of this thesis.

#### Research Materials

To obtain and conduct research this investigation was approved through the Research Ethics Board (REB) from the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada (Appendix A). Categories of auto recordings and audio/DVD tape recordings and photography have been approved, as well. The equipment and materials used for the collection of data were as follows:

1. Anecdotal observation records and field notes
2. Computer technology and internet access
3. Fieldwork journals and analytic memos
4. Audio/DVD/Video and tape recordings
5. Photography: 35mm, digital, portable, Polaroid

6. Transcription of children's conversations
7. Data collection documented and assessed
8. Informal and unstructured interview  
transcriptions (e.g. students, teachers,  
administration and staff)
9. Randomly selected children's artwork and  
writing assignments were periodically collected

#### Audio Recordings

Audio tape recordings were used to obtain the participant perspectives from the students and teachers; administration and staff members of LCH and LLC (Appendices R-S). Audio recordings were taped and recorded from a VCR recorder, to be used and played on a VHS/TV viewing system.

#### DVD/Video Tape Recordings

In this section (Appendices R-S), DVD and video tape recordings were obtained from the administration, teachers, students and staff of LCH and LLC. There were also video recordings taken from LCH and LLC campus areas including the surrounding community of Ladyville and Belize City. The method of recording was played on a DVD and VHS/TV viewing recording system.

### Photography

Photographs were used to conduct research as one of the pieces to the collections of raw data (Appendix S). Photos from two digital cameras, one 35 mm camera, three 35 mm portable cameras and a Polaroid camera were used to photograph the participants. The students, teachers, administration and staff members participated. Photographs were included in Chapter Four of this dissertation to further validate the study.

### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the questions, to initially prepare the school-age students for the inquiries. A second pilot was conducted at the end of the inquiries to see the differences in the responses.

The open-ended pilot inquiry was conducted with the documentation from the school-age student's responses. A particular question was: "What do you like best, about Liberty's School?" (Appendix Q). As a result of the before and after pilot study, there were opportunities to reorganize materials, revise questions and revisit the procedures of the grounded theory (Glaser, 1997) tradition.

## Procedures

The qualitative ethnographic and grounded theory (Glaser, 1997) study resulted in a 17-week rich descriptive research study. This study was conducted on LCH and LLC campus site. The participation of the research consisted of 12 school-age students, two school-age teachers and LCH and LLC staff. The co-teaching team, administration and staff were observed and interviewed on a consistent and regular basis.

The collection of data consisted of conversations and dialog in small and large group sessions with interviews of students, and staff. In addition, anecdotal note-taking (authentic dialogs), computer technology, internet sources, fieldwork journals, analytic memos, photography, audio and DVD/video tape recordings. Some of the students' artefacts were also collected including: art work (e.g. drawings and paintings), journals and writing assignments (Morrison, 2004).

The length of inquiry occurred during classroom activities and school events which varied, 5 to 15 minutes or 30 minutes to 1-hour in length. Appropriate open-ended questions of inquiry during interviews were chosen based upon previous analyzed situations (Appendices O-Q).

Additional interview questions were conducted based upon classroom activities inside and outside the learning environment. The orphanage campus and local community events were also included in the investigation as invitations were given (Appendices O-P).

Due to the confidentiality of orphanage policies and procedures for the safety of the children, confidential records of the students' families were unavailable. The administration advised that many of the children that have been orphaned need time to gain trust with a visiting adult. A time progressed with the inquiries; a healthy rapport began to emerge over time.

### Locating Myself within the Study

I had often thought of my own identity and the way I understood order and social behaviour (Madison, 2005), as I looked upon my own personal background of being a, "child of an orphan" and professional career as an early childhood educationalist. I wondered about my own roots and this type of disconnect or uncertainty that seem to haunt my personal and professional past.

Like so many of the Belizean children that had been orphaned, I too, carried a query of unanswered questions, "Where did my family originate from?", "Will I ever meet my biological grandparents?" "How will this curriculum be utilized?" And, "How will a non-traditional learning environment work in this context?" I also began to ask myself, "What has given me the right to invade this country, and take out knowledge from the Belizean culture"?

Conversations with the children from LCH and LLC were short dialogs however, allowed me to feel as though I was still connecting and fitting in. I wondered if this was due to the way the children viewed their own past, as I continued to reflect back and position myself in this culture and study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). A study of this kind is referred to as, a reflexive



ethnography, which is a type of “turning back” on “self” for research paradigms, and for a moral responsibility relative to interpretation and representation (Madison, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Even so, this study became a desire to gain a better understanding of the Belizean culture, and to empathize and sympathize with those of similar backgrounds. I believe, “A true ethnographic study begins with “humility”, the “meeting” of the eyes, and the “embracing” of the souls” (Cook, 2007).

#### Summary

The methodology section of this dissertation addressed an ethnographic and grounded theory study of a singular international educational institution. It is a study that is *reflexive* (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) in nature and, in return, empowers the children and staff at LCH and LLC.

In this qualitative study interview questions were utilized that allowed to pose questions to students, teachers and staff (Appendices J-P). The administration and staff members from the campus in the interviewing process were positive and proud of their culture (Appendices H-L). Furthermore, there is optimism for innovative curricula and

new theoretical approaches to be discovered. Therefore, as social-constructivism continues to be explored, educationalists and early learning teachers may begin to unravel the political and social explanations of research studies in the social sciences (Cook, 2009).

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

#### Introduction

The data analysis of this project considers many different ways that distil how things work; knowledge is gained and names the essential features in significant areas of a diverse cultural setting. The process is like a spiral; beginning with the data collection and ending with a narrative (Creswell, 2002).

Shank (2002) refers to this act of writing as an integral part of an active partner in the qualitative research process. The writing becomes as less invisible, and more of an active partner in the research process. The interpretation of the data collected became a way to describe and analytically categorize the interpretations as the conclusions were formalized.

This process was based upon what I was learning and understanding from the culture and the curricula being implemented in the school. There were segments that were often reflected and revisited, making a personal assessment returning back to the literature on certain cultural themes that were being explored. Further questions were based upon the data that was being collected (Creswell, 2002).

In this chapter, the data was collected through an organized method that was separated into five different sections including:

1. Cultural Artefacts and Influences
2. Curricula: Traditional and Non-traditional
3. Learning Environment: Montessori and Reggio Emilia
4. A Dichotomy
5. Staff Responses

The "Cultural Artefacts and Influences" section contains Belizean cultural experiences, poetry and stories told. These were authentic pieces given to me, to be shared from the Belizean culture. The "Curricula: Traditional and Non-traditional" section reviews both ways of learning that work together in this type of learning environment.

In the "Learning Environment: Montessori and Reggio Emilia" section, provides the school-age students and teacher responses which have been divided into seven Montessori diverse subject areas including:

1. Geography
2. Language Arts
3. Mathematics
4. Music
5. Practical Life
6. Science

## 7. Sensorial (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006)

A section referred to as, "A Dichotomy", explains how LLC's learning environment utilizes both traditional and non-traditional ways of learning. The "Staff Responses" section addresses diverse perspectives and views from LCH and LLC staff that work daily in this environmental setting. The responses from the students and staff were analysed and interpreted with an analysis and interpretation discussion following each section. In addition, a summary has been included which is an attempt to tie all of the sections of discussion together.

### Cultural Influences

*Historical Significance* - While a visitor in Belize, I observed many differences from other countries. Belize, a post-colonial society in general, was influenced by the Europeans within the development of the country. Particular influences are still prevalent today as seen in a manner a Belizean speaks to a European woman. In Belize, I was referred to as; "Yes Mum" and "No Mum" or "Yes Miss" and "No Miss". It took time for me to adjust to this manner of addressing someone. I wanted to be considered as an equal. I had never thought of having any type of power or privilege however; in this culture I was spoken to with respect. It felt very strange for me and did not seem to make any sense.

However, to a Belizean, service was important and it meant happiness to serve. The younger children and school-age students living on the campus also referred to me in the same way as the adults spoke to me. The longer I was here, and for those living on campus felt very comfortable around me as they began to pronounce my name as *Miss Paaamelllaa*. Apparently, this pronunciation is very common throughout the Caribbean.

*Belizeans* - A few practices that occur within the culture is drama. Every daily decision may be made with emotion, and each situation that occurs during an event could become dramatic. I soon became aware of this when several reactions from the peoples demonstrated a jealous type of attitude in nature. This seemed to occur when one individual became very envious of another, for simple reasons such as; accomplishments, achievements, or other recognitions. These types of behaviour can be very unfortunate, and yet, very real. It was shared with me that this type of behaviour is referred to as the "crab affect". When one crab in a pot of many is trying to make it to the top, the others try and push it back down. Here is a prime example of a situation that happens quite frequently throughout the neighborhood. Situations that become evident in individuals lives seem to raise havoc among the people in

the community when one person is trying to change their ways, which may cause strife and tension. I observed this type of behaviour occasionally and as it was explained to me, "Belizeans like to exaggerate; they like to pretend!" (LCH and LLC staff, personal communication, June 4, 2007).

*Children* - The children in Belize and in surrounding areas are considered to be seen and not heard in this culture. To a Belizean family, respect for their elders is extremely important; a child may be smacked across the face or swatted with a palm leaf to indicate power from the adult. This behaviour was difficult for me to accept and adjust as I continued to learn how different cultures discipline children (J. Rahn, personal communication, February 22, 2007).

*Superstitions* - One understanding results in the peoples of the culture acting particularly superstitious. Legends, stories or tales of old may cause a Belizean to become fearful of certain events or situations. This type of feeling filtrated to the children and often caused distress or fearfulness toward each other, people and circumstances (LCH staff, personal communication, February 27, 2007).

*Visitors* - One day, a visitor came to my yellow ecologically secure living space, which is cylinder dome shape construction unit. This unit is quite different than

living in an apartment or house, although it was extremely comfortable (e.g. ceramic tile floor, ceiling fan, two closets, desk, twin bed, nightstand and washroom). In western cultures, it is customary to walk up to the front door, knock or ring a door bell. However, in Belize, a Belizean stands back from the door and yells to the person inside (e.g. "Miss Paaamellllaaa, are you there?" "Miss Paaamellllaaa, I am here to talk to you!"). At any rate, the individual might yell something from afar prior to entering a dwelling. This also took time for me to acclimatize as people yelled outside my doorway (LCH staff, personal communication, February 25, 2007).

*Food* - The food in Belize is always a good topic for discussion as with many other cultures. I was told by several Belizeans that they think the Western culture eats too much, and does not eat enough fresh foods (LCH cooking staff, personal communication, March 10, 2007).

On Liberty's campus, food is basically fresh every day. There is an abundant supply of rich soil, garden and farm nearby to plant seeds and raise crops as with many Belizeans have their own gardens to raise fruits and vegetables. The fruits and vegetables are readily accessible daily to either eat or sell at local markets. Often, local Belizeans bring donated fruits and vegetables to the orphanage to be sold at



the market for extra funds (LCH Cooking Staff, personal communication, February 27, 2007).

*Cooking* - The cooks at Liberty occasionally fry some foods such as; bananas, plantains or jack cakes. However, most of the food is freshly baked and cooked daily (e.g. baked bread, tortillas, rice and potato salad). Some of the food may contain parasites if not properly washed which may also become a problem due to the severity of the heat and refrigeration issues (LCH cooking staff, personal communication, February 27, 2007).

*Medicines* - Upon visiting a physician with my own illness, I observed how plastic soda pop or water bottles were recycled. A patient's cough medication and liquid antibiotics may be dispensed in these plastic bottle containers with a white sticker label indicating the medication type and the direct usage attached to the outside of the bottle. This approach seemed to become a way to recycle plastic bottles. And, as I saw how people get well, I also saw how one person died (LCH staff, personal communication, March 20, 2007).

*Belizean Funeral* - One day, I heard from several employees that the vegetable gardener from LCH campus, Mr. El'fredo had become very ill and had passed away on Friday, March 30, 2007. Several days had gone by prior to his

passing, when I realised that Mr. El'fredo was not in the garden. I saw a new face tending the area and I too became concerned about the older man, for he was somewhat of an icon with the Children's Home. Mr. El'fredo's health was not the very best, as he was an older gentleman which caused the director, teachers and staff members to be concerned for his well-being. And, apparently, he lived alone in Belize for approximately 25 years, while many of his family members remained in El Salvador.

Mr. El'fredo was an employee of Liberty Children's Home, who had been referred to as the vegetable gardener. He was a kind and gentle man who enjoyed the children as he puttered around and tended his vegetable garden. Mr. El'fredo specialized in vegetable plants including; tomatoes, red and green peppers, zucchini, cabbage, lettuce, radishes, cilantros, cauliflower, cassava (potatoes), and okra.

Mr. El'fredo was one of the first employees when I arrived at Liberty that opened up his heart by showing me the things that he loved the most. He didn't speak any English, only Spanish, so it was difficult for me to understand exactly what he was trying to share with me. However, his facial expressions and the way he gestured and motioned for me to follow him to his garden, informed me he

had something very special to show. Sure enough, it was his lovely vegetable garden that consisted of huge, luscious dark green healthy vegetable plants. Some say that he had a green thumb, for he took pride in his vegetable garden as he kept a close eye on the plants to keep the weeds, insects, and other creatures away.

The day of the funeral approached and Miss Kari, LLC Art Studio Teacher, Mr. Stevie, the LCH grounds keeper and I rode together where the grave site ceremony was to be held. This was to be a Spanish ceremonial funeral and I was interested in attending, for I wanted to see how those from other countries remembered their deceased. The funeral was scheduled on April 3, 2007 at 2:00pm in one of the fields close by. It was a grassy field about ten minutes outside of Ladyville area and around 20 people attended the ceremony which was mostly Spanish speaking individuals. The pastor gave a short eulogy with several songs sung in Spanish. Except for one song, for even though it was sung in Spanish I could sing it in English, *when the Role is called up Yonder, I'll be there.*

Miss Kari, the school's artillerista (art studio teacher) and I were the only European visitors' present however; we were accepted as though we had been part of the original family. We congregated with about 20 people that

were huddled under a shade tree as the pastor read from the Holy Scriptures, sharing the Easter resurrection story. He commented that Mr. El'fredo would be resurrecting in glory with other members of the family. These words even in Spanish gave words of hope for all those around.

Approximately 100 feet, from the shaded tree area were cement block tombstones that had been made for others that had passed on. The tombstones were rectangular shaped stone boxes approximately four feet wide by eight feet in length.

As the ceremony proceeded, ten men worked diligently laying bricks and mortar creating a tomb which was to hold the burgundy wooden box to lay the casket in. During the ceremony, several individuals began to share stories of their relationships with Mr. El'fredo. A shiny yellow cloth was laid over the wooden casket, and items such as: flowers, bananas, zucchinis, and candles were laid on top of the cloth. A blue truck holding the wooden casket drove over to the cement box where it was then taken from the back of a truck, and put into the rectangular stone tome box. A shiny, silky, yellow cloth was spread over the casket, followed with dirt, flowers, fruit and vegetables were then sprinkled around the top of the casket. These items represented Mr. El'fredo's love for gardening and were tokens of appreciation and respect. The people began to sing songs, as

the candles were lit. There were not any remembrance cards nor was there a book for those to sign; it was a simple and respectful ceremony.

As the crowd began to close in, and as the sun began to shine even brighter and hotter, it became time for us to leave. The pastor approached us by showing us who the family was that represented Mr. El'fredo's family. His initial family lived far away in El Salvador and it was too far for them to come to the funeral. I gently touched the arm of the woman representing his family; and we gave a special homemade card on behalf of the children from Liberty Foundation, the children's Home and School.

For me, this funeral was so different than many of the North American funerals that I have attended. Furthermore, as simple as this was, there was yet a stirring of warmth and tenderness that came over the crowd as the service proceeded at the funeral site. Even though the funeral was completely spoken in Spanish, it was an experience that inspired and touched me. More importantly, it was that we cared enough to meet the eyes, hearts and souls of those that embraced a man that cared about living things.

It was a memorable experience for me to witness death, and the grieving process of one that many did not know, but will remember as the little Spanish man who loved the orphan

children and his vegetable garden. So as the song is sung, *when the role is called up yonder . . .* I want to be there, too (LCH staff, personal communications, April 3, 2007).

*Belizean Animals* - The animals living around the community consisted mostly of cats and dogs which may be treated indifferently. It is difficult to feed pets on a regular basis when many of the people within the surrounding areas are also hungry. An animal may receive a small amount of food for several days depending on the type of scraps available. I noticed that many dogs from the area were very thin and suffered from mange. One stray puppy wobbled onto the campus as it was taken in and cared for by the director. It was good for the children to help the adults take care of the puppy, bringing it back to good health. The puppy was named "Franky" as he became one of the campus pets (LCH staff, personal communication, February 15, 2007).

*Crocodile* - Speaking of animals, I was visited one fine day by a reptile. I was pleasantly surprised with the presence of a baby crocodile in my upstairs dome washroom. Mr. David Martinovich (known as Teacher Dave), the school-age teacher enjoyed many different types of animals that surrounded the area. He was very proud of the first campus dog, *Libby*, which he had helped to save as a very sick

puppy. Teacher Dave also during my stay had found a dog *Franky* that he brought back to a healthy state.

I found out very quickly that Teacher Dave enjoyed wildlife animals. He rose very early in the morning just to watch and listen to the birds. Many of which seemed to squawk instead of chirp, as a very happy woodpecker each morning as he enjoyed his special routine of pecking on a tree post outside my dome bedroom window.

The iguana and snakes were always slithering through the tall grasses from the side fence of our shared living dome. One morning, Teacher Dave came in contact with a baby crocodile and wanted to keep it for a pet. Apparently, one of the local boys caught the baby croc, and decided to sell it to Teacher Dave. He purchased the baby crocodile for \$25.00 Belizean, and \$12.50 USD. Up close, the reptile looked like an alligator with a long bumpy, scaly tail and body that measured approximately four feet in length. A protruding jaw of around one foot was wrapped with a cloth to keep his mouth closed during transport.

Upon the arrival of the baby crocodile to Liberty, to my pleasant surprise there was a problem finding a home for the crocodile. Needless to say, while a home was being located for Liberty's newest reptilian family member, our

upstairs washroom of the dome unit where Teacher Dave and I lived was now chosen to be the baby's croc's new home.

For three days and two nights I wrestled with thoughts of that crocodile escaping from the washroom, slithering down the spiral stone staircase to my downstairs bedroom and making his way into my room. It was difficult trying not to entertain such thoughts when scary forms of wildlife actually do exist in this area of Belize and are living around your living premises. From my past as a preschool teacher, one song kept dancing in my mind. The old preschool song seems to fit this experience well as it made this story even more amusing.

#### ON THE BANK OF A CROCODILE

Oh she sailed away  
on a bright and sunny day,  
on the back of a crocodile.

You see said she  
He's as tame as he can be,  
I'll ride him down the Nile.

The croc winked his eye  
As she waved a fond goodbye,  
wearing a happy smile.

At the end of the ride



The lady was inside,  
and the smile was on the crocodile  
(Preschool Education Music, 2008).

This was not the end of this dilemma by any means, for the baby crocodile was still going to be around the area. It was such a good feeling to know that a new home had been located on campus for the reptile. A cage was found in the pet area where an Iguana used to hang out, this was now going to become a new home for the baby croc (D. Martinovich, personal communication, April 12, 2007).

*Funny Stories* - Speaking of, "stories of others"  
(Jones, 2005, p. 784) Mr. Tillett, LLC school principal's Husband, enjoyed telling funny stories to the employees around campus. As I stated previously in the "Belizeans" part of this section, they are very "dramatic". Of course telling stories falls under that category (LCH and LLC staff, personal communication, June 4, 2007).

One day, while driving back to the LCH campus from a very fine day of visiting the Belizean Zoo and Old Belize Museum, Mr. Tillett began telling me several funny stories (Appendix V). I can remember that day well, as Mrs. Tillett and I laughed hysterically while Mr. Tillett chuckled to himself driving down the highway and sharing his funny

stories with us (D. Tillett, personal communication, March 19, 2007).

*Poetry* - Cornelia Hoogland (2004), professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Western, Ontario, Canada, understands how narrative inquiries can become so personal. Her interests lie in the arts of playwrights and poetry. Hoogland suggested:

Understanding of poetry and fiction's conventions as practiced within narrative inquiry within Faculties of Education has arrived not from the literary arts (as one might expect), but from anthropology and its connected fields. (p.45)

Mr. Price, grounds construction and maintenance manager was known around campus for his interest in poetry writing. Mr. Price was also known for his loyalty to his country and his employment to Liberty as he had written so fervently in his poetry (Appendix W). I can also appreciate and understand Carl Leggo (2004), who claimed:

Poetry is a practice of language and literacy that can foster hope and wisdom for living more effectively and productively in the world. Simply, my claim is that attention to words can open up possibilities for attending to the world and becoming in the world. (p. 29)

Many of the cultural influences from the events, poetry and stories (Belizean artefacts) shared from the peoples have formulated together pieces of culture, inspiration and knowledge to me. I believed it occurred not only because of my personal background of being a "child of an orphan"; rather, I became open to the immersion from the culture within.

It became apparent to me that these inspirations were pieces of the Belizean culture that came directly out of the genuineness and sincerity from the hearts of the peoples. Thus, it was essentially moving that the Belizean culture was willing to share and trust their inner-most thoughts and ideas with me.

#### Curricula: Traditional and Non-traditional

Early childhood educationalists have explored for over a decade and still ask the same questions concerning current health, growth, and developmental strategies for young children. This accounts for international research of early learning to be considered the focus of much challenge and debate today (Abbott & Nutbrown, 2001).

Post-colonial Belize, utilizes a traditional way of instruction within the teaching and learning process. However, the Ministry of Education in Belize has identified well and supports the first non-traditional early learning

environment (Liberty Learning Centre), which has been the case in Ladyville. Belizean's are very open to sharing knowledge using a traditional and non-traditional approach to learning (J. Rahn, personal communication, February 20, 2006).

*Traditional* - Behaviourist teachers at most, choose to directly instruct using a formal agenda. Social-constructivist teachers wait, listen, and transform instructional strategies that will meet a child's learning needs more individually.

Cooper (2002) suggested that an attitude of care in the teaching and learning process emerges through profound empathy toward a *one-to-one* relationship. This type of attitude can be employed in a behaviourist or constructivist approach as the approach is formulated to meet the needs of the learner.

Selected ideas, thoughts, and theories from traditional or non-traditional educational approaches can be changed, transformed, or transferred to current curricula in the environment which individualized a child's learning ability and is responsive to the needs of the student. These instructional strategies represent the approach regardless of the theory that is being implemented. The most widely used traditional approach to a school curriculum entails a

standardized public school program.

Traditional curricula include teacher directed instructions that are structured and product oriented, which use paper and pencil tasks and rote memory with whole group learning methodologies. An example may be from, B. F. Skinner (1904-1990) a behaviourist, and traditionally emphasized that all aspects of education including those encompassing the early childhood years were based upon external forces from the environment which influences human development (Essa, 2003).

Teachers that choose to use a behaviourist, instructivist, traditional or direct approach, may continue to view students as empty vessels. Some traditional approaches hesitate to work well with children of diverse cultures and do not match developmental, cultural, or environmental needs of early learners. Lisa Delpit, (2005) suggested:

The dilemma is not really in the debate over instructional methodology, but rather in communicating across cultures and in addressing the more fundamental issue of power, of whose voice gets to be heard in determining what is best for poor children and children of colour. (p. 16)

Various approaches to the teaching and learning of

young children have been developed and advocated however, the real focus is often centered on the curriculum content in the processes of learning as a secondary issue. Vygotsky (1978) suggested, "We need to concentrate not on the "product" of development but on the very "process" by which higher forms are established" (pp. 64-65).

More often, approaches that mirror social-constructivism (non-traditional) may become problematic due to the context, culture or environment of a particular school setting. For example, institutionalized schools in different parts of the world that choose to implement non-traditional approaches may result in unresponsiveness to the approach.

Rogoff (1993) suggested, "Each culture has its own system of norms and values in which development and interactions of children evolve" (p. 162). Freire (1993) in *Pedagogy of the City*, calls for a reformation of curriculum, "a school system that transforms the space where children, rich or poor, are able to learn, to create, to take risks, to question, and to grow" (p. 37).

Exchanging diverse methodologies and different ways of knowing in cultures may transform early learning experiences for young children in developing countries. The challenge should be the development of new methodologies as well as,

possibilities for alternative ways of knowing. That may be taking on an epistemological stance of exploring new ways to discover learning from a wide variety of diverse ideologies. Responses from the administrators, teachers, staff members, and students in this study have helped to gain a clearer understanding. For the most part, those issues that relate to the operationalisation of non-traditional and foreign curricula chosen in an institutionalised context of a developing country.

*Non-traditional* - Non-traditional Montessori and the Reggio Emilia approaches are more of a significant way to view behaviourism and social-constructivism working together through the lens of a particular small orphanage school. LLC's newly built school, offers a preschool and a school-age program that utilizes both theoretical frameworks simultaneously. The non-traditional approaches differentiate the classroom learning environment while meeting developmental needs, using traditional ways to meet Belizean academic standards.

In the past, LLC has been in the process of implementing Pikler to the infant and toddler program and Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches to the school-age curricula. These approaches allowed for numerous ways to differentiate the classroom learning environment; naturally

enhancing the early childhood learning program.

Liberty children and students have many opportunities to create, discover, experiment, investigate and manipulate objects from a non-traditional perspective. Tobin (2005) recommends that differentiation calls for more "flexibility, divergence and confidence" (p.196), in one's own professional ability to see difference in a learner and to respond appropriately.

Teachers of a non-traditional learning environment that implement Montessorian approaches are referred to as *guides* and assist children as they are needed (Czaja, 2005). Thus, (Jones, et al., 2002), suggested that social-constructivist perspectives are played active roles of the learner which can be reasons why this theory appeals to so many early childhood educators. Teachers of non-traditional learning environments that choose Pikler, Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches understand how young children are supported and allow development to occur naturally.

Interestingly enough, Teacher Dave Martinovich, international lead teacher of LLC's school-age program along with co-teacher, Sandra Cruz, local Belizean Kindergarten teacher, designed a learning program that utilizes a variety of teaching styles and strategies. Teacher Dave and Miss Sandra developed several creative and innovative ways to



match student's individual learning style from past situations and from children who have experienced abandonment, abuse and neglect. The teaching repertoire emphasizes behaviourism and social-constructivism methodologies, a dichotomy of two separate approaches that worked well in this type of learning environment.

Students who arrive into LLC's program range from a variety of cultural and ethnic diverse groups to situations that pertain to each child's growth and developmental needs. School-age Teacher Dave indicated to me that he was especially interested in the individual learning aspect of each child's unique developmental level, as he commented, "individual assignments are contingent upon the student's ability to work independently or semi-independently" (D. Martinovich, personal communication, April 22, 2007).

Experts suggest that a constructivist teacher may document, interpret, observe, make decisions, record, study and reflect upon the nature of the child as a learner rather than beginning with a curriculum or content in the curricula (Branscombe, et al., 2003). "There are aspects of behaviourism and constructivism that are both useful, such as breaking down tasks into parts and having clear goals, on the one hand, and appealing to the cognitive needs of the learner, on the other" (Gupta, 2007). And, the positive

correlations of Piaget, Vygotsky, Skinner and Watsons' work have all had great impacts on learning.

In this particular classroom and non-traditional learning environment, Teacher Dave chose to use an open-ended approach with each child which ultimately merits success through the whole learning process. The diverse and individualistic early childhood program at LLC was built upon a Montessori and Reggio Emilia early learning environment that mirrors order in spatial relationships and promotes a child's effort of independently critical thinking.

Gales and Yan (2001), while lecturing to the Annual Meeting at the American Educational Research Association remarked, "Teachers, who believe in constructivist approaches to student learning, find it important for students to think creatively" (Gales & Yan, 2001, p. 12).

The Montessori approach is scientific and has evolved from Maria Montessori consistently observing and studying children (Driscoll & Nagel, 2005); likewise, the Reggio Emilia approach observes, documents and interprets children's conversations and dialog (Edwards, et al. 1998).

This type of approach has the potential to link behaviourist and constructivist approaches together; creating an individualistic child driven learning

environment. It lends itself to a learning environment that will encompass seven interest areas including: Language, Geography, Mathematics, Music, Practical Life, Science and Sensorial (North American Montessori Center Handbook, 2006).

In each of these learning areas, students are encouraged to choose tasks based upon the completion of the task prior to the next choice per their own weekly contract. Reading and writing components consistently reflect the tasks being generated as a variety of manipulatives are displayed to assist the child's developmental and individualistic learning style.

Sandra Cruz school-age co-teacher commented:

How I deal with kids must be something that flows naturally as I enter the calls. I no way pretend to be a strict teacher and I put myself in their case and try my best to become their classmate in a way that they will feel comfortable with me and not see me only as a teacher but also as their friend. Learning should be "natural". What does this mean? It means that she or he will learn the material thought in such a way that the information can be given to the teacher back without using the same words. Natural learning is when a child can conquer new challenges without the consistent help of the teacher. In traditional learning there is not

natural learning, simply because the children are used as a computer and they are expected to remember. As natural learning, we don't *teach* them we guide them to teach themselves. The "natural" learning is defined in two ways; (1) the child will be guided to learn at their own speed, (2) the child's feelings are free to explore new adventures with the guide, not of a teacher, but a friend, they will see in person in front of them (S. Cruz, personal communication, August 25, 2007).

#### Learning Environment: Montessori/Reggio Emilia

The learning environment of the school-age classroom at LLC resulted in a selection of diverse Montessorian based manipulatives and tools. The learning spaces of the learning environment were inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach which in Italy is considered the third teacher (Edwards et al., 1998).

Montessori believed in scientific observations and that education is not essentially what the teacher gives, however, education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences with the environment (Montessori, 1946).

The photographs in this thesis have been selected to

show the organizational methods to the interest learning areas that house the materials, manipulatives and tools available to the school-age students at Liberty. The photographs also are a way to validate the research obtained.

Montessori said, "The environment should reveal the child, not mold him" (cited in North American Montessori Handbook, 2006, p. 1). Gesell (1880-1961) acknowledged, "A child's growth and development is influenced by forces, and the child is a product of his or her environment" (Gesell, 1943, p. 41). The stimulus of the learning environment as it changes creates a transformation of a child's learning experience; thus, improving the developmental process simultaneously.

More importantly, Rosenblith (1992) agreed that a young child's growth and development can improve as the learning environment stimulus changes. Valentine (2001) also suggested, "With the socio-constructivist model of learning, the environment must be flexible and open to modification, as the child, a protagonist progresses along their learning paths" (p. 11).

Seemingly, the learning environment is a critical piece as teachers continue to discover a child's potential of growth and development. The environmental factors influence

the stimuli that indeed affect the developmental process (Martin, et al., 2006).

#### Pilot Study and Student Responses

At the beginning of the student interviews in the learning environment context, I planned to ask the school-age students two questions as a type of pilot study. The first question began at the beginning of the interviewing process and the second at the end.

The intent for this pilot was to prepare the students for inquiries as well as, compare the student's responses toward their educational and unique learning environment as the relationship began to grow. The first question that I asked the students was, "What do you like best about Liberty's School?" These were the student's responses:

**Rosa (Age 9):** I like everything at Liberty!" "I like working with Miss Kari (Artillerista)!" "I like to ballet a lot!"

**Zarrina (Age 8):** "Nothing!"

**Brittany (Age 5):** "A building, singing!" "I like my mommy and daddy! I want to stick my pictures on my cubby."

**Delroy (Age 8):** I like to play with my glue gun!" "I like organs." "I like lettuce." "I like to play with blocks with Rupert!"

**Tyrell (Age 5):** "I like lines to write." "Letters and 1, 2, 3" "I draw pictures."

**Dejhon (Age 7):** "I like to play with computers, building a house, playing with the blocks!"

**Sherwin (Age 6):** "Build the house." "I like building houses!" "I like putting together puzzles and I like to work with Stevie!"

**Roy (Age 5):** I like colouring. Miss Paamella, I like it when you write my words!"

**Jason (Age 7):** "I like to play the computer." "I like to colouring!" "I like to work with Stevie (grounds keeper)"

**Charlie (Age 5):** "Playing the computer!" "Play outside on the swing." "Play the puzzles!"

**Jada (Age 6):** "Play outside!" "I like to write my name." "I like to draw my mom, my dad, my little brother, my little sister too!"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I like to do art with Miss Kari." "I like to eat hotdogs!" (LLC School-age students, personal communication, March 7, 2007).

It was very close to the end of my visit when the students were asked a second question, "What do you like to do best at Liberty School?" The photos have been displayed with each student to validate their responses.



*Figure 4.1. Jada (Age 6): "I like to do my Contract. I love to colour in the book with Jason. I like to play centre choice with Jason."*



*Figure 4.2. Jason (Age 7): "I like to play with Jada and colouring. I like contract, centre choice."*





Figure 4.3. Sherwin (Age 6): "I like to do my best, play, and I like to colour, that is my best!"



Figure 4.4. Delroy (Age 8): "I don't know!" "I like to play . . . colouring."

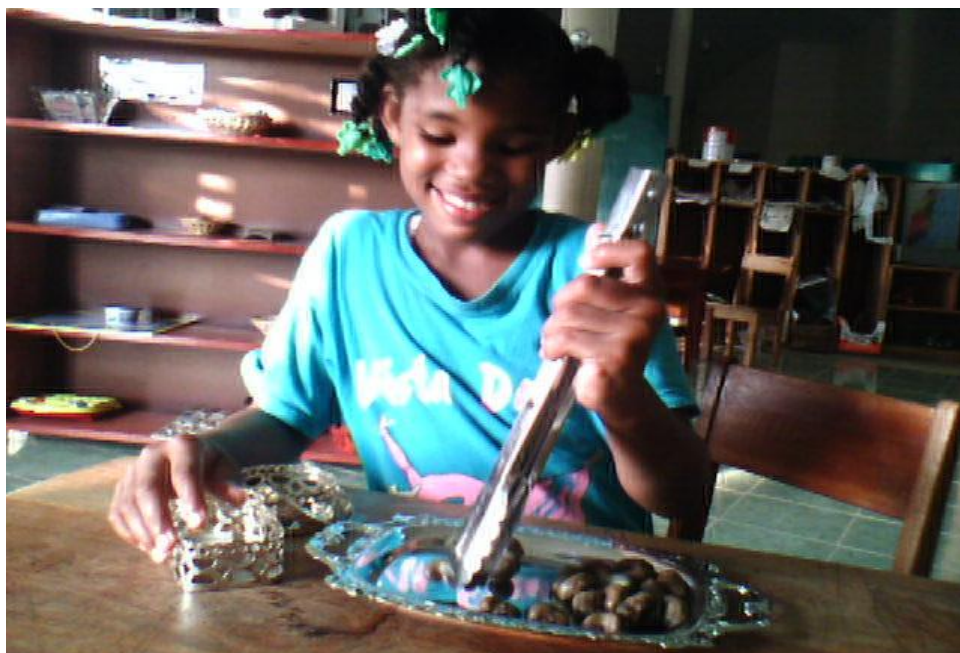


*Figure 4.5.* Rupert (Age 6): "I like to look at books, and, I like to do art with Miss Kari."



*Figure 4.6.* Tyrell (Age 5): "I like looking at books."  
"I like contracts, math books . . . I like homework."





*Figure 4.7. Zarrina (Age 8): "I like to do math, and reading with Miss Lisa last night."*



*Figure 4.8. Roy (Age 5): "I like colouring and drawing!" "And, I like to play the computer."*



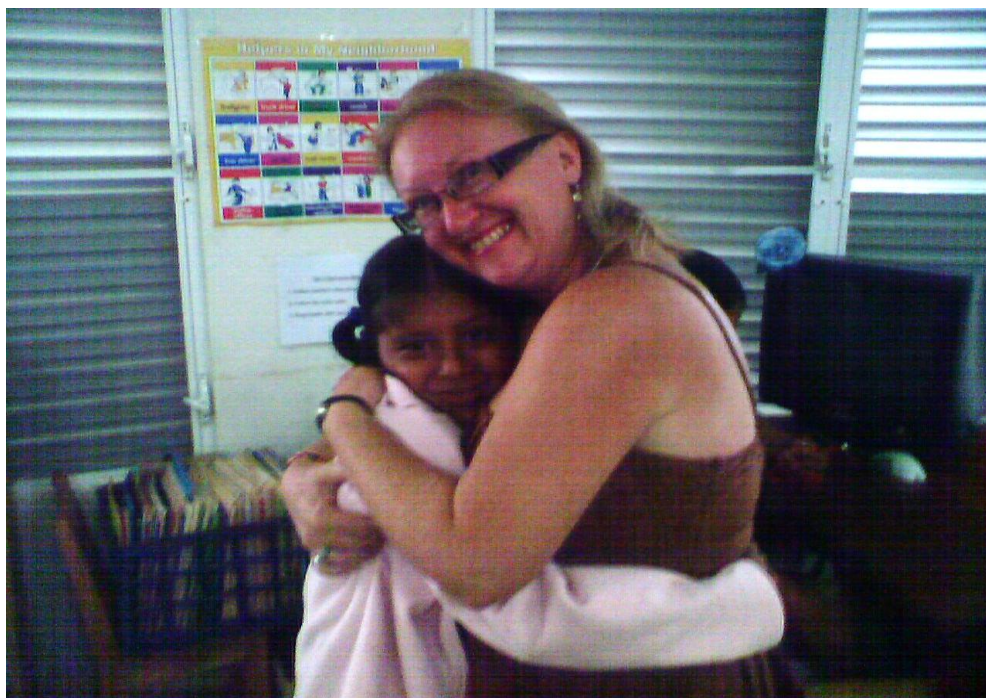
*Figure 4.9.* Brittany (Age 5): "I like to work with Stevie!" "I like to play with the funny faces!"



*Figure 4.10.* Charlie (Age 5): "Read books, I like to work with Stevie and get juice. Teacher David, caught an iguana, and a turtle. Stevie cracked the coconut and



we ate it together! The end, no more . . . storytime!"



*Figure 4.11. Rosa and Miss Pamela.*

**Rosa (Age 9):** "I like the teachers, and I like the kids, and I like Miss Smitty (Montessori Directress), and I like Miss Pamela." "I am sad because Miss Pamela is leaving Friday morning, and I will cry when she leaves, and I will always remember her." "I will e-mail her." "Thank-you for the diary, and I don't want Miss Pamela to leave" (LLC, school-age student, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

### Analysis to Pilot Study

The analysis of the student's responses from the first question and the second question resulted differently. I interpreted the responses from the first question were as if the students were unsure how to exactly answer an inquiry. Most of the responses began with; I like (e.g. art, colouring, computer, and writing). These responses were not informative.

My interpretations of the second question responses were more informative; as the students and I at this point had built a friendship and trust. I found the students to be more eager and excited to share their feelings, thoughts and ideas, which were more informative and descriptive. The students shared things they enjoyed at school, helping the staff and personal feelings. The photographs illustrated the expressions of the students while they were exploring in the learning environment.

I interviewed teacher Dave and co-teacher Miss Sandra. Both of these responses were informative as they shared how their role of a teacher is played in the context of an institutionalized and non-traditional learning environment. Both conversations are as follows:

**Miss Pamela:** "Teacher David, how does your role as a Teacher function within this organizational structure?"

**Teacher Dave:** "In my opinion, the organizational structure of the school and the children's home will continue to complement each other. (There is no homework here, and parent meetings are not a problem)."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see yourself working in your role within the Belizean community and culture?"

**Teacher Dave:** "I see the home and school functioning well within the Belizean culture and community. This basically has to do with the Belizean culture being a fairly open-minded and adaptable one."

**Miss Pamela:** "Within the near future, include strategies that you think will improve the children's home and school?"

**Teacher Dave:** "There are many future goals and plans for the children's home and school. Some of the major ones would include becoming more financially independent. Also, we should be closer in-line with the National Belizean Curriculum. And, ultimately I would like to see Liberty Learning Centre become of the top early educational institutions in Belize" (D. Martinovich, personal communication, May 20, 2007).

Miss Sandra Cruz believed:

In my own opinion my role as a co-teacher means to me putting the kids before my necessity. As a co-worker, Teacher Dave taught me that being a teacher is not only

sitting in front of a table and just teaching. It is going beyond what is accepted in the teacher curriculum. For me, being a teacher in this organization means concurring new ideas, as well as, implementing them here which I believe, it has opened new ways of teaching. I not only feel as a teacher in Liberty, but, as well as, a mother knowing that I have to set a good example and be almost every-day with them (S. Cruz, personal communication, May 20, 2007).

#### Analysis of Teacher Responses

The teacher's responses were found to be candid, buoyant and informative. Personally, I found that both teachers coming from traditional and non-traditional teaching backgrounds enjoyed both ways to teach. The teachers helped me understand reasons why they choose the best learning style approach for each student. I began to understand the instructional methods and learning strategies chosen for each individual student were because of the significant differences each student offered.

One teaching strategy that I learned from the school-age teachers was simply to be, "natural" in utilizing a teaching approach, as I learn to choose the best method to use with challenging students and diverse teaching situations.



### Montessori Learning Areas

*Geography* - In the Montessori learning environment geography, global awareness and social studies are included as one of the seven learning areas. Several large cloth maps were displayed of the world which were divided into hemispheres and was hung on a blackboard in the school-age classroom. Small puzzle maps were located in an organized shelving unit which included a map of the country of Belize. The organized shelving unit included: two Montessori globes, wooden world puzzles and smaller paper maps, land forms and a big book of the world (see Figure 4:12), (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).



Figure 4.12. Geography Learning Manipulatives

One day, I asked a few of the students to tell me what their thoughts were of their country. These are the some of the student's comments:

**Rosa (Age 9):** "I like when the people don't kill! I don't like when people fight with each other!"

**Brittany (Age 5):** "I do not like to stay here!" "I want to go with my mom!"

**Roy (Age 5):** "I like to play computer and colouring, playing with the turtles and the sharks!"

**Dejhon (Age 7):** "I think its fun!" "Play with toys, play outside!"

**Sherwin (Age 6):** "I like to ride bike and I like to play, run and race with my friend!"

**Jason (Age 7):** "Fun!" "Nothing . . . else!" "I like the zoo!"

**Jada (Age 6):** "I like to play with Rosa!" "I want to go with my mummy!" "And, I like to do my contract."

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I like the bicycle and I like the book and I like the cars." "I like to fly the kite." "I like to get a bag of chips."

**Zarrina (Age 8):** "The flowers!" "The, butterflies!" (LLC, personal communication, May 16, 2007)

Teacher Dave commented and responded to an inquiry as he shared:

I love geography, and I love maps; integrating a language structure. Belize is here on a map, (pointing to the map of Belize, as he continues) and the children are learning all six districts which include: Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize, Cayo, Stann Creek and Toledo. Children write and trace the shapes, cut and colour from the original map, cutting out the districts and pasting them on another page. This is using several steps like working with a puzzle. Non-traditional approaches are more effective than a textbook because the children have several steps that allow them opportunity to learn areas and places of their surrounding areas (D. Martinovich, personal communication, May 15, 2007).

The school-age students at Liberty continue to accept the reality of living at Liberty for a variety of reasons. These may include: understanding their own country surrounded by diverse animals, boating, fishing, people violently fighting in different areas and just wanting to live with their own biological families.

During one of many conversations, I listened as two of the school-age students shared about their personal families, "I just want to go fishing with my father like we used to", as he continued to share about his past fishing

experiences with his father. Another student shared how it was so sad for her not to see her mother, "I wish I could see my mother again"; as she showed a necklace around her neck that her mother had given her before she left her at the children's home.

I realized that some of the students simply recalled things that they enjoyed while living at Liberty and other students were sensitive regarding the social awareness of this new type of community and family (Liberty school-age students, personal communication, February 21, 2007).

In Reggio Emilia, children are highly respected by their communities, families and schools (Edward, 1995). Montessori highly respected children as she developed her first school, in the lower socio-economic conditions of Rome, and travelled to many parts of the world sharing her approach to curious educators and teachers (Standing, 1959).

*Language Arts* - The school-age students at Liberty practiced reading, writing and communicating by speaking English as they utilized learned phonetic language skills each day. Manipulatives in the language arts learning centre areas consisted of alphabet puzzles, plastic magnetic puzzles, and dry-erase board writing tablets. Writing instruments include; pens, pencils, and coloured pencils are used to practice writing the alphabet, names and words.

Children also use language workbooks for integrated writing skills. Innovative alphabet puzzle games and many different styles of manipulatives were changed and rotated on a bi-weekly basis to challenge the language arts skills learned (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).

My observations of a typical day resulted in observing students in the classroom who chose to practice writing words using plastic magnetic alphabet letters, dry-erase boards with paper and pencil writing tablets. Phonetic computer games, reading and writing groups, alphabet floor puzzles, and simple reading games with manipulatives, journaling and picture books were also available to the students. The materials displayed in the language arts shelving unit (See Figure 4.13), show many forms of writing tools that are organized and available to the students, which are necessary in a Montessori learning environment (Montessori, 1965).



*Figure 4.13. Language Arts Learning Manipulatives*

It has been recommended (Branscombe, et al., 2003), to teachers of young children that wish to diversify literacy opportunities in their classrooms, it may be appropriate to consider these ideas:

1. Label objects in the classroom
2. Label Learning centres within the classroom
3. Display children's writing, stories, lists, group stories and dictations
4. Provide a variety of diverse children's books in all learning centre areas
5. Provide a variety of writing materials, paper, pads, journals, markers and pencils in many centre areas
6. Encourage children to write their ideas in

journals, stories, lists, plans, letters, games and class newsletters (p. 165).

In a Reggio inspired learning environment, teachers' document and record children's dialog and writing as Branscombe (et al., 2003) also encourages, to be displayed on classroom walls through documentation boards. These methods are being explored at Liberty, as well (Edwards, 1995).

One particular morning, I observed children engaged in three different ways to experience learning in the language arts area. Several children were working with writing materials independently, others were working with peers, while two or three children were working directly with their teachers. Those children working with peers practiced writing letters and words on small hand-held dry-erase boards. They chose to write words such as: ant, cat, dog, girl, mouse, robot, and parrot.

As they continued this activity it was noteworthy to observe how each child's visual discriminatory skills were used to recognize words through pictures. The children were able to verbally say the words as they decoded the pictures.

Snow (1998) suggested that the idea of language is usually picked up through interactions with peers and adults, but for children who are raised in poverty, these

opportunities are often limited. These are the student's writing experiences:

**Miss Pamela:** (Asking each child . . .) "What do you think of when you write these words?"

**Charlie (Age 5):** "I think letters, is fun! I think . . . I don't know!"

**Jason (Age 7):** "I like to do ABC's!" "That's it!" (See Figure 4.14).



*Figure 4.14. Jason spells his name utilizing alphabet dice*

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I love you!" "I wanted to say . . . ride a horse!"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "I think I'm tired of writing words!"



**Zarrina (Age 8):** "I think writing words is fun!" "I love to write pig, girl, robot. And, I have fun drawing, writing words, and I like drawing words. I like to colour and do ballet and then I have so much fun with the things that I do in class!"

**Tyrell (Age 5):** "Words?" "Writing 'pig'!"

**Jada (Age 6):** "I like to write the most!" "I like to draw fish!"

**Brittany (Age 5):** "Good!" "Nice . . . nice . . . very Nice."

**Sherwin (Age 6):** "I want to write 'butterfly'!" "I want to write 'doggie'."

**Roy (Age 5):** "I like it!"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "I love to write the letters!" (Cook, 2007).

While observing each student's ability to write letters and words, I quickly discovered that for most part, writing was a challenge. I observed each student's fine motor coordination when gripping writing tools using pens, pencils, and coloured pencils became unstable. I assessed the reason for this challenge was due to each student's past experiences using writing materials.

Teacher Dave, essentially informed me that writing materials in Belize were sometimes difficult to obtain for

most of the students. Utilizing these types of writing instruments and tools would be a new experience (D. Martinovich, personal communication, February 22, 2007).

As further practice in writing took place, there became ways to guide the children's enthusiasm for writing activities and strengthen their fine motor coordination. Teacher Dave also indicated to me that he typically incorporated writing in every learning centre activity and experience so as to provide consistency in writing for that particular subject area (D. Martinovich, personal communication, April 10, 2007).

The students continued to work in the Language arts centre areas, utilizing simple lined-paper journals that were created to assist their writing experiences while completing specific tasks in a chosen centre. The students wrote sentences which demonstrated what they had learned in a learning centre, and then illustrated by drawing exactly what they had written.

Teacher Dave and co-teacher, Miss Sandra often assisted each student's writing ability as to revisit their experiences, as well as, practice techniques to further printing. These activities were a way to strengthen each student's ability for using language skills to visually

discriminate, reading and writing.

During one reading activity, while looking at the story, *Follow That Hat*, by Pierre' Pratt, I asked the student's these questions:

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me why you *liked* this story"? "What did you like *best* about the story?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "I liked the story about he and the hat!"  
(Pointing to the page where the man found his hat) "Cause, he got the hat!" "That's it, nothing else!"

**Charlie (Age 5):** "I liked the man in the water!" (Charlie took the book and began reading by choosing his own words to each page as if he were reading the story) "I liked this one . . . My hat . . . My hat!" (As Charlie giggled)

**Brittany (Age 5):** "I liked it when Leon went in the water, and I liked his hat went away in the sky . . . high, high, high and I liked the hat was in the sky . . . the air and the plane!"

**Dejhon (Age 7):** "I liked this part because it is funny!"  
(Pointing to the first page where the man in the story was by his house) "Because the hat blew away and it's nice to swim and I like to swim . . . because of the crocodile, the shark, and the waterfalls!" "I'm finished!"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "When he got his hat back!" "Because, he didn't take his hat off!"

**Zarrina (Age 8):** "Because it is pretty!" "The man with his nose!" "He's smelling ice-cream, and the lady's hair was blowing and the ball and he stretched his hand!"

**Rupert (Age 6):** (He chose to look at each page of the book and tell me what he liked) "I liked these flowers!" "I liked that car!" "I liked that rose!" "I liked that bicycle!" "I liked the bus!" "I like the space!" "I like the train!" "I liked the boat!" "I liked the castle!" "I liked the man!" "I liked the horse!" "I liked the parachute!" "I liked the scooter, the best!" "I liked the paper!" "I liked the ball!" "I liked the castle!" (Cook, 2007).

It was obvious the students' comprehended the story well and were able to recollect portions of the story that they enjoyed, related to, and wondered about. Interestingly enough, the sections of the story that pertained to the man's hat falling into the water from an ocean liner boat, to his travels in the rainforest or riding on a horse interested the children. I assessed this was due to things that appeared familiar with the students here in their own culture and their country of Belize, which also included other countries of Central America, as well.

Soundy (2003) wrote, "Reading and literacy awareness is

a crucial part of school readiness. Language is a process and the building block of developing skills are often in the child's own language" (p. 127). Theorist, Norm Chomsky (1965, 1986) proposed a dominant biological theory and argued that children were born with a language acquisition device (LAD) in their brain which allows them to understand grammar of all human languages (Martin, et al, 2006).

Later that same day, I observed Charlie and Zarrina playing a writing game using dry-erase boards. They had created a simple competitive game as they both tried to write words faster than the other. It was noteworthy for me to observe children enjoy writing. For some, it is a chore while at LLC; writing only adds sheer delight and enjoyment to a child's repertoire of writing experiences. I can understand why Dave shares his passion for writing as children learn to write the alphabet and formulate words that are enjoyable, creative and fun.

Most of the children in this particular classroom have disabilities and limitations due to their own unique blend of conditions regarding growth and development (D. Martinovich, personal communication, March 15, 2007). It is a challenge for Teacher Dave and Miss Sandra to individualize each child's developmental level to match academic learning levels in a post-colonial country that

instructs traditionally and uses direct methods of teaching for all children.

Some of LLC's students have previously been exposed to a structured learning environment, while most have not ever been to a traditional school setting (D. Martinovich, personal communication, April 22, 2007).

Liberty Learning Centre is definitely an innovative place with the sole purpose of providing positive learning experiences that occur on a regular basis. It is a place where students are given individualized learning instruction that has brought passion back into the reading and writing process one step at a time through a differentiated learning perspective.

*Mathematics* - Originally Mathematics goes back to when archeologists found early designs carved from bones or scratched into rock which clearly demonstrated an early awareness of geometry. It was found in prehistoric societies that counting was important to keep track of valuables such as animals, food, spears or weapons by using pebbles, stones or small sticks (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006). For a young child, an understanding of summation is one of the first mathematical computations. Children graduate from sensorial exploration to counting and then measuring. "The

children learn more in touching than watching" (S. Cruz, personal communication, May 7, 2007).

One day, as I asked the students what they thought of math problems, this is what they shared:

**Miss Pamela:** Hi Charlie, can you tell me what you think of working with math?

**Charlie (Age 5):** "I think its fun!" "It's nice!"

**Miss Pamela:** Can you tell me more?"

**Charlie (Age 5):** Its exercise, cause its something. It feels fun!" "No more!"

**Miss Pamela:** (Observing Rupert as he moves rubber bugs around to practice counting) "Rupert, what do you think of working on math problems?"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I like to play with the rubber bugs!"

Miss Pamela: "Tell me more about what you think of counting with these bugs!"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "Fun!" "It's funny!" (As he continues to move the rubber counting bugs around)

**Miss Pamela:** "Rosa, what do you think of math?"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "I think math is the, bestest thing!"

Miss Pamela: "Can you tell me why?"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "Because, you learn!" I think Teacher Dave did a good job on the math!"

**Jason (Age 7):** "I like to do work, like this!" (As he points

to his math problems in a workbook) "I like to do this, like adding stuff!" "And, I like to write and colour!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Tyrell, can you tell me why you like math?"

**Tyrell (Age 5):** "It's good!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Can tell me more?"

**Tyrell (Age 5):** "Cause, it's good!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Roy, can you tell me what you think of math?"

**Roy (Age 5):** "Colour Math!" "I did my write!" "Colouring in Math book!" "I like to colour on white paper!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Jada, can you tell me what you think about working on math?"

**Jada (Age 6):** "I like to do my homework!" "I like to do the page where *plus* is!" "Nothing else!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Brittany, can you tell me what you think about when working on math?"

**Brittany (Age 5):** "I think I do a good job on my contract!"

I do good on my math on my *plus* and *take away*!" (Roy and Dejhon began to play with the rubber insect counting bugs)

**Miss Pamela:** "Dejhon, what do you think about playing with these rubber bugs?"

**Roy (Age 5):** "I liked playing with it!" "And, I liked the bugs!" "I liked the matching game!" (Colourful matching cards are connected to the rubber bug container to help the student count)



**Dejhon (Age 7):** "I think its fun! I liked to play with it!"  
 I liked to put it on my papers" "I like counting one . . .  
 two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . seven  
 . . . eight . . . nine . . . ten!" (Dejhon showed me the  
 rubber bugs) "I like when they wiggle around!"

Another day, I had a conversation with Delroy as he shared with me his thoughts of math as he chose to use brown cashew seeds and silver baskets as part of the Montessori Method of using manipulative (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006). I observed that the math centre was one of the interest learning centres that the students enjoyed the math working tasks or games. The conversation and photographs show progress, as follows:

**Miss Pamela:** "Delroy, tell me what you think of this math counting game?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Its fun!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me why you think it is fun?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Because, I love this game!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me why you love this game?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "I am learning that when you put the cashew seeds in the basket, it makes me feel good."

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me how it makes you feel?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Because I like putting the cashew seeds in the basket."

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me how do you count the cashew seeds?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "I could count the cashew seeds."

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me how will that help you count the seeds?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Because I count the cashew seeds!"

**Miss Pamela:** "By counting the seeds, how does this help you in math?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "When I count the cashew seeds, I write the answers."

**Miss Pamela:** "Is there anything else?" "Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about this game?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Yes, I like it because it helps me to do my math." "When I finish counting, I write my answers."

"It helps me do my math when Teacher Dave and Teacher Sandra are busy!" "The cashew seeds help me to do my math, very good!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you Delroy, for telling me how you enjoy counting cashew seeds and how they help with math."



Figure 4.15. (#1) Delroy, counting brown cashew seeds



Figure 4.16. (#2) Delroy, counting cashew seeds



*Figure 4.17. (#3) Delroy, uses tongs to pick-up cashews*



*Figure 4.18. (#4) Delroy, continues the process*





*Figure 4.19. (#5) Delroy, finishes counting seeds*  
(LLC student, personal communication, May 23, 2007).

In a Montessori learning environment, the manipulatives are often placed in natural baskets and displayed on metal trays (See Figures 4.15-4.19). These materials are part of the task procedures and also captures a child's attention which becomes an invitation to explore and investigate (Montessori, 1965).

In a Reggio inspired classroom, recycled items are often used for learning subject areas (Edwards, 1995), such as in this case, cashew seeds work well for mathematical computations.

Teacher Dave began to share his thoughts regarding non-traditional ways of instruction in Math. He responded in

this way:

The kids like doing their math. To them, it is just like another centre choice, but it gets done. They get the same amount of work done as in a traditional school, but more freedom as to when they can do it. This is also an opportunity to use manipulatives. I believe that boys use the manipulatives frequently because they are more kinesthetic, and the girls use their verbal language skills within mathematical concepts and in problem solving techniques. I have seen this same type of occurrence in other countries where I have taught like; China, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States. I think that within an individualized learning environment, children master their skills quickly because this is one-on-one. I can catch the mistake as soon as it happens; it is harder to un-teach a mistake than it is to teach correctly the next time (D. Martinovich, personal communication, May 7, 2007).

School-age co-teacher Sandra Cruz also shared her thoughts on teaching mathematical concepts in a non-traditional learning environment. Miss Sandra responded in this way:

You will not need to read any instructions because you can use objects and other stuff to get the lesson

across in a much easier and fun way. The children will find more fun doing a math lesson than sitting on their chair with a math book and pencil and in fact; the children pay *more* attention than the traditional way of teaching. For a traditional lesson, we had to plan and go ahead and teach the curriculum, it takes more time and gets boring for the teacher. By doing the non-traditional way . . . we may read the curriculum, use other objects and the children learn the concepts. For some children with certain challenges, they tend to like math now using non-traditional ways. They get bored by just sitting and doing problems; they learn more by moving around the classroom and can help the child developmentally (S. Cruz, personal communication, May 7, 2007).

*Music* - One day, while assisting Miss Kari, the artillerista (art studio teacher), while cleaning the art studio, we found a box of musical instruments. Miss Kari was so excited that she decided to share these instruments with the students. She began to plan for later that day in the afternoon to take the students over to a shady spot on the campus and explore with the instruments together as a large group.

In the afternoon, all of the school-age students were

present, including, Miss Sandra and Miss Melodie, the assistant teacher. As Miss Kari began to present the musical instruments to the students, I was able to ask each student what kind of instrument they liked and why they might like to play it.

These were the comments that came from the students:

**Miss Pamela:** "Rosa, what kind of instrument do you like to play?"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "I want the drum!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Rosa, why do you want to play the drum?"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "I like the sound!"

**Sherwin (Age 6):** "Maracas!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Why did you choose the maracas?"

**Sherwin (Age 6):** "Because I like it, I like to sing it!" (As he began to shake them)

**Tyrell (Age 5):** "I am drumming like this!" (Showing the movements of tapping on a drum)

**Miss Pamela:** (Smiling and laughing with the children)

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I like the . . . and that goes like . . ."  
(Showing how the Xylophone made different notes by tapping on the bars)

**Miss Pamela:** "Zarrina, what kind of instrument do you like?"

**Zarrina (Age 8):** "I don't know!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Delroy, tell me what kind of instrument, do



you like?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "The sticks!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Why do you like the sticks, Delroy?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Cause, they make music!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Charlie, what kind of instrument do you like?"

**Charlie:** "I like to play the drums!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Charlie, tell me why you like to play the drums?"

**Charlie (Age 5):** "Because it is fun!"

**Roy (Age 5):** "I like to play the drums!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Brittany, tell me what kind of instrument do you like to play?"

**Brittany (Age 5):** "The drums!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Why, do you like to play the drums, too?"

**Brittany (Age 5):** "Because it's fun to beat!"

**Dejhon (Age 7):** "I like the cymbals!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Dejhon, why do you like to play the cymbals?"

**Dejhon (Age 7):** "It makes beautiful sounds!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Jason, what instrument do you like to play?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "The drum!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me why you like to play the drum?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "Why?" ". . . Cause its fun!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Jada, tell me what kind of instrument to you like to play?"

**Jada (Age 6):** "I liked to play with the instruments . . . with the one you go, clapper!" (Two wooden sticks together, as she snaps the wood together to make the clapper sound)

**Miss Pamela:** "Why do you like the clapper instrument?"

**Jada (Age 6):** "Because it's a fun sound!" "I'm finished!"

There were six students that preferred the drums and six that chose the sounds of other instruments. As I observed the students playing the instruments, I noticed that the drum is able to carry a beat with a tap, tap, tap and the other instruments make a variety of noises. The students that liked the drums enjoyed the tapping sound, and the students said, "It's fun!" (LLC school-age students, personal communication, May, 29, 2007).

As I continued to observe the school-age students playing the instruments with big smiles on their faces, the excitement infiltrated the air with melodious sounds mixing together for a positive musical learning experience. The students were excited as they continued trading and playing approximately ten different instruments. They sang several songs and enjoyed creating their own type of music together. Several employees began to stop by to listen and enjoy the music as they were leaving the campus for that day.

Miss Evangie, who works in the laundry area, stopped by

and began to clap her hands and sing with the students. This was a musical experience which allowed the children an opportunity to express their feelings in a way that was emotionally healthy, socially stimulating and enjoyable.

As the school-age students were so happily involved with playing the musical instruments, my mind began to wonder as I quickly began to reminisce of my past travels to a children's orphanage in Iasi, Romania. It was there, I had also observed children regularly involved with music which included: guitar, piano and voice.

Musical experiences in Iasi, were found to be successful at the Romanian orphanage when music lessons lead to periodic performances which were later implemented regularly in the monthly schedules. It was discovered that music activities helped the children continue to work through their social and emotional developmental issues (Iasi, Romanian orphanage, university child psychologist, personal communication, June 2000).

I had wondered if musical experiences in one country may also be helpful in another country, as well. It has been discovered through behavioural scientists, medical doctors and child development specialists, that music training of any sort significantly enhances child development.

Studies have also indicated that exposure to music,

through listening, or playing an instrument can definitely have an effect and improve problem solving skills, physical coordination, visual, auditory, language skills and self-discipline, as well as a child's self concept (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).

*Practical Life* - Montessori believed that a prepared learning environment was integral to a child's development. The practical life centre of the classroom learning environment provides simple everyday activities that require organizing and cleaning. Tools used for practical life tasks included: brooms, sponges, brushes, screw drivers, and cleaning rags. Enhanced and complex life skills may require cooking, computers, gardening, first aid, decorating and event planning (See Figure 4.28), (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).



*Figure 4.20. Practical Life Learning Manipulatives*

Practical life activities assist students in a Montessori learning environment in a variety of ways, (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006), these may include:

1. High levels of concentration
2. Sense of order
3. Pride in work
4. Taking responsibility for cleaning
5. Increasing sense of independence
6. Respect for community, classmates, teachers
7. Development of fine and gross motor. (p.3)

A particular practical life activity may be considered a cooking exercise that utilizes several different ways to measure. This activity may also be explored using two water containers and a large plastic pipette.

One of the school-age students Zarrina helped me experience a practical life learning activity. Our conversation was how she enjoyed water play in the practical life centre.

I simply began the conversation by asking Zarrina:

**Miss Pamela:** "Zarrina, can you tell me what you are doing with the water and these containers?"

**Zarrina:** "You pour the water in there, see?" (Showing me how she uses the large pipette with water and a container) "Then you squeeze it!" "The water goes up, and then you put it in the next cup and then you squeeze it again, and it goes in the next cup!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Do you know how to measure it?"

**Zarrina:** "See . . . I put in 20 (pointing to the number mark on the pipette) "It's my turn again!" (Showing me with water) "See there . . . I did 10 . . . I pass 3 and then I pour it in the container again." "I pour it again, then I squeeze it again, and I past 21." "I did it at 30, it was at 30!"

**Miss Pamela:** "What does that say?" (Pointing to a number)

**Zarrina:** "Three-fourth ounce!" "My turn again!" "I squeeze it, I squeeze it!" "I squeeze it!" "I squeeze it!" (Zarrina continues to squeeze water in and out, showing a big smile on her face)

**Miss Pamela:** "Why do you enjoy the water play?"

**Zarrina:** "I put it in the cup!" "You squeeze it, and I put it in the cup. See, almost filled it up, Miss Pamela, 4 ounces!" "You squeeze it, and then you fill it!" (Zarrina and I continued playing with the water for approximately five more minutes) "It filled up!" "I put it in the next cup. I hold the cup and I squeeze it!" "Past 2 ounces, you pour it in there!" "You pour it in, you finish and then you pour it back in." "See the bubbles, Miss Pamela, see . . . you squeeze it and I put it in the next cup. I squeeze it again!"

**Miss Pamela:** "I see, I just hold it like this?"

Zarrina and I continued to squeeze and pour the water from each container for about 15 to 20 minutes. She and I filled the pipette with water, looked at the number amount, conversed, and poured the water back into the second container (See Figures 4.21-4.22). I was glad to see Zarrina happy while enjoying this activity. There were days when Zarrina was not happy in her work, seeing her enjoy an activity that also was teaching her practical life necessities and skills, made me happy, as well.



*Figure 4.21. #1. Zarrina, squeezes water into container*



*Figure 4.22. #2. Zarrina, squeezes water out of container*



The school-age practical life learning area at LLC provides activities that are purposeful for a child and displays, "a conscious seeking purpose" (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006, p. 5).

*Science* - In the science area of a Montessori classroom, experiments often focus on the "why" of the weather, the need for light, air or food to sustain life. The science and health areas at LLC were in the process of studying the digestive tract and entire major parts, as well as skeletal parts of the human body.

The LLC classroom offered a display of materials of a small human skeleton with proper labels for the children to study. And, a puzzle containing pieces from the human digestive tract was also available to manipulate study and learn.

I observed children manipulating objects to understand the human body and systems. The children enjoyed science from a biological standpoint as well as, botany and plants growing in the classroom and around the outside areas grounds of the campus.

On another day, the students observed baby chickens being born and began to understand eggs hatching, and the process of new life. Animals included: an iguana, dogs, puppies, a baby crocodile, bunny and a guinea pig have also

brought pleasure in and outside classroom. Animals are a major part of the science centre of a Montessorian classroom which is an extraordinary link to science experiences (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).

One particular day, I was invited to observe Teacher Dave and the school-age students observe a "balloon" science experiment. As I observed the students, they were very quiet as they watched Teacher Dave blow up a medium size yellow balloon and tie a string around the balloon. He shared with the class that as his purpose was to measure the balloon prior to putting the balloon into the kitchen freezer.

The point of this science experiment was to see if by putting the balloon into a cold space, what might happen to the balloon. The question was, "Will the balloon shrink or will it expand being in the cold freezer?" The children made their predictions and later in the afternoon went back to the kitchen to see the outcomes.

As the balloon science experiment proceeded, I began to ask the students what they predicted and this is what the students thought may happen to the balloon:

**Miss Pamela:** "Jason, tell me what you think will happen to the balloon?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "The balloon will get bigger with cold!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Rupert, can you tell me what will happen to

the balloon in this science experiment?"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I don't know!" "The balloon will get smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Charlie, what do you think?"

**Charlie (Age 5):** "The balloon, it will get smaller!" "It's fun!" "When they lifted it up high, then the balloon dropped!" "People get the balloon!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Jada, what do you think will happen to the balloon?"

**Jada (Age 6):** "I predict that it will get colder!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Roy, what do you think will happen?"

**Roy (Age 5):** "Smaller!" "I predict the balloon will get smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Sherwin, what do you think will happen to the balloon in the science experiment?"

**Sherwin (Age 6):** "I think that the balloon will get small!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Jason and Dejhon, what do you think will happen?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "I predict it will get smaller!"

**Dejhon (Age 7):** "I predict it will get smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Tyrell, can you tell me what you think will happen to the balloon in this science experiment?"

**Tyrell (Age 5):** "I don't know!" "I predict it gets smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Brittany, what do you think?"

**Brittany (Age 5):** "I didn't see it!" "I didn't go!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Delroy, what do you think will happen to the balloon?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Get smaller." "It will get smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Zarrina, what do you think?"

**Zarrina (Age 8: (As she shakes her head)** "I don't know!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Rosa, can you tell me about the balloon experiment?"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "He put it in the refrigerator."

**Miss Pamela:** "What happened when Teacher Dave put the balloon in the refrigerator?"

**Rosa (Age 9):** "The balloon got smaller."

**Miss Pamela:** "Why did the balloon get smaller?"

**Rosa: (Age 9):** "Because it was in the refrigerator."

**Miss Pamela:** "Jada, can you tell me about the balloon experiment?"

**Jada (Age 6):** "Teacher David put the balloon in the refrigerator."

**Miss Pamela:** "What happened to the balloon?"

**Jada (Age 6):** "It gets smaller."

**Miss Pamela:** "Can you tell me why the balloon got smaller?"

**Jada (Age 6):** "Because it gets hotter!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Delroy, can you tell me what happened with the balloon experiment?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Teacher Dave put the balloon in the refrigerator and then Teacher David took it out, it popped!"

**Miss Pamela:** "What did you think of that?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "I think that was good!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Why was that good?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Cause, when Teacher Dave put it in the refrigerator and took it back out, it popped!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Delroy, why do you like experiments?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Cause, it's funny!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Jason, can you tell me about the balloon experiment?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "Smaller and smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Why did the balloon get smaller and smaller?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "Huh, it is nice!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Jason, why do you like science experiments?"

**Jason (Age 7):** "Cause, it's fun . . . it's a blast!"

When students explore the science area of a Montessorian learning environment, they are consistently encouraged to clarify a question, explore their own theories and formulate their own conclusions (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).

Thoughts from the balloon science experiment were taken from the school-age students as follows:

**Miss Pamela:** "Delroy, tell me what you thought of the

balloon experiment?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "The balloon did not get smaller."

**Miss Pamela:** "Zarrina, what did you think of the balloon experiment?"

**Zarrina (Age 8):** "Because, when they put it in the freezer, it wasn't too cold!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Zarrina that could be the problem." "Sherwin and Jason, what did you think?"

**Sherwin (Age 6):** "The balloon will get big and big!"

**Jason (Age 7):** "The balloon will get bigger with cold!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Dejhon and Roy, what did you think?"

**Dejhon (Age 7):** "I predict the balloon will get bigger!"

**Roy (Age 5):** "I predict the balloon will get smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "I understand that you predicted that the balloon would get bigger and smaller, but it didn't?" "Can you tell me why not?"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I predict the balloon didn't get smaller because it wasn't going to get smaller!"

**Miss Pamela:** "That's right Rupert; it didn't get smaller or bigger, it just stayed the same" (LLC School-age Students, personal communication, May 15, 2007).

*Sensorial* - Early childhood educationalists continue to explore new ways that may provoke the natural senses of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching. In essence,

plays a vital role regarding healthy growth and development of young children. Sandra Cruz, LLC school-age co-teacher comments, "Non-traditional learning should be *natural*" (S. Cruz, personal communication, May 12, 2007).

Montessori pioneered sensorial manipulatives, tools and materials that have created ways to assist children in the refinement of their own senses and to better serve their own interests. Sensorial materials in a Montessorian learning environment essentially are referred to as, "materialized abstractions" (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006, p. 10).

In a Reggio inspired learning environment, the materials are continually used as a "provocation" that drives and provokes a child to inquire and question (Edwards, et al., 1998).

Students at LLC were given the opportunity to explore their world using natural senses in a variety of selected materials. One of the manipulatives provided were colourful, smooth plastic small Lego blocks. The children enjoyed building things that related well to their surrounding areas.

A conversation of two boys building a house explained their excitement for this type of manipulative available in the sensorial centre area. This conversation proceeded as

follows:

**Miss Pamela:** "Why do you like snapping these pieces together?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Cause, I like putting these pieces together, I like to build stuff!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me more about building stuff?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "A house!"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "A house!" "This is very hard!"

**Miss Pamela:** "I can see that this is taking a very long time." "Can you tell me more about it?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "The house does not go like this!"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I'm building it!"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "How do you build that?"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "I'm going to make it flat!"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "See . . . mine is different!"

**Rupert (Age 6):** "See that . . . A little building!" (Showing a little triangle shape) "We are working hard to build this!"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "He means we are working hard to build a building!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Your building looks just like a house!"

(Delroy leaves the building process as Sherwin comes over to complete the house} (LLC, personal communication, May 30, 2007)



Learning environments that offer a variety of materials allow children many opportunities for discovery. Delroy obtained a new activity which was a cognitive learning experience as he proceeded to put together a plastic truck with small tools (Montessori, 1965). This was the extent of this conversation:

**Miss Pamela:** "Delroy, what would you like to tell me about this particular toy?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** (Putting together a truck using plastic tools) "It is fun, but I think some of the kids broke some of it!"

**Miss Pamela:** "What else would you like to tell me?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "I want to tell you that this is the BEST toy!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Why do you think so?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Because, I don't know!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Think about it, and tell me why?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** "Because, it is really fun!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Anything else?"

**Delroy (Age 8):** (As Delroy pauses) "This is fun to play with, because, I like fixing things and taking them apart!"  
(Delroy, almost finished putting the truck together) "See . . . it now!"

**Miss Pamela:** "It is finished!" (With a big smile of

satisfaction)

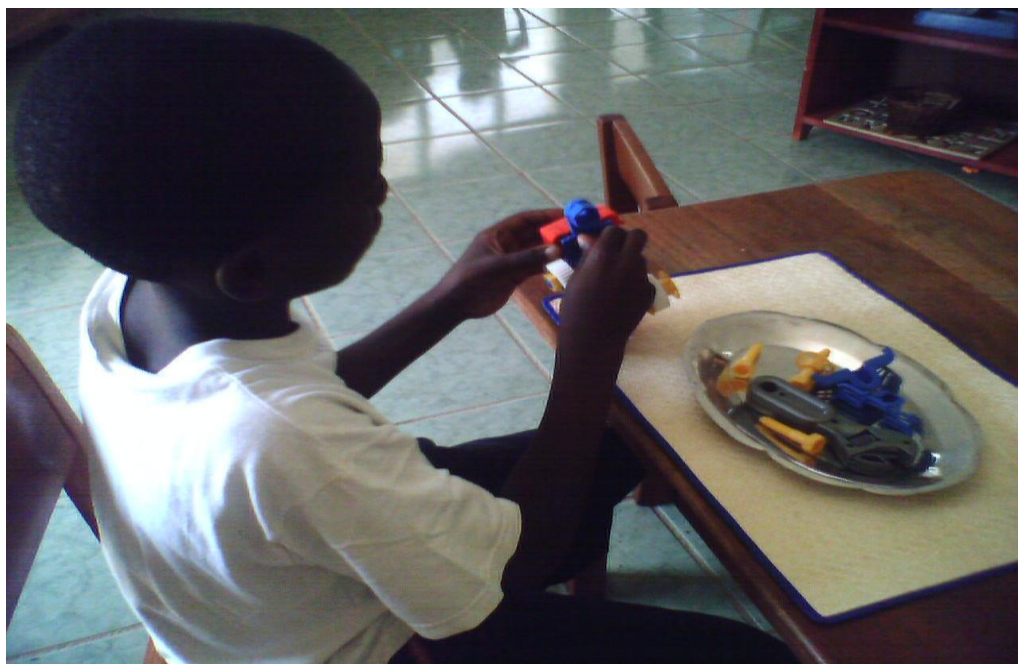
**Delroy (Age 8):** "Miss Pamela, it's now time to clean-up, so, I must take it apart!" "I love playing with this, it's my BEST toy!"

**Miss Pamela:** "I can see how well you enjoyed this toy by the way you put the truck together!" "Nice work, Delroy!"

(See Figure 4.23-4.2.), (LLC, personal communication, May 23, 2007).



*Figure 4.23. (#1) Delroy, assembles a truck*



*Figure 4.24. (#2) Delroy, continues the process*



*Figure 4.25. (#3) Delroy, completing the task*

Montessori believed that an enriched learning environment is the key toward healthy growth and development in young children. Montessori used the concept of isolating natural senses while presenting stimuli of strong contrasts that followed with finer differentiation (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).

For example, colours were defined through materialization of colour tiles so a child's sole focus was through the manipulative as the cognitive skill was learned. Lego block building is an example of a type of manipulative that reinforces skills taught in the learning environment (D. Martinovich & S. Cruz, personal communication, March 12, 2007).

#### A Dichotomy

The Belizean school system and community-wide classroom learning is primarily teacher directed and structured. This includes instruction throughout the whole country and in every school, including private and public Belizean schools. LLC chooses to implement a blended program of Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches in a non-traditional style of learning environment. These approaches allow the school-age program to choose and to implement diverse ways of instructional strategies for some particular learning styles and situations.

Montessori and Reggio Emilia are holistic approaches that focus on the whole child, meeting needs in the classroom learning environment. Thus, both approaches provide an open-ended style of teaching strategy that explores both traditional and non-traditional ways of instruction. LLC's program is essentially, "a dichotomy" because it negates just traditional or non-traditional and uses strategies from both that have been implemented and are working here.

An example that has been utilized frequently at LLC in the school-age classroom is that students on a regularly basis choose to complete mathematical computations and problem solving situations using a variety of traditional ways and non-traditional ways. Teacher Dave commented, "Some children prefer the "math text" as well as, "manipulatives" to work through problems. I am sure in some cases, both are important to the child" (D. Martinovich, personal communication, May 7, 2007).

#### Administration and Staff Responses

Interviews were conducted with the administration and staff (e.g. CEO of Liberty Foundation, LCH/LLC Director, one local Belizean board member, caregivers, caretakers, art studio teacher, preschool teachers and Montessori Directress) of LCH and LLC campus.

The intent of the inquiries and interviews was to provide to those in the position of authority that make decisions for the orphanage and the school. The same was for many others that hold specific jobs on Liberty premises. The purpose was to obtain responses on how these individuals thought of working in a non-traditional learning environment of an orphanage and school. This opportunity allowed the peoples of Belize to let their voices be heard regarding their thoughts and ideas of this setting, which was a way to uplift the culture. Paulo Freire (2002) encourages the inquirer to empower the culture through ways of active participation.

The interviews consisted of questions to the adult participants and these were the responses:

Miss Marcelle

(CEO of Liberty Foundation)

**Miss Pamela:** "Administratively speaking, and in your opinion, how does your role as the Founder and CEO, function within this organisational structure?"

**Miss Marcelle:** "My role as the Founder and CEO of Liberty Foundation UK, involves the overseeing of all programs run out of Liberty Children's Centre: the centre of Belize being the prime project funded by the Foundation. The UK office takes the responsibility for all decisions made with regard

to the philosophies, methodologies and direction of Liberty Children's Centre including the hiring of all key international staff members."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see yourself working in your role, within the Belizean culture and community"?

**Miss Marcelle:** "I proudly became a Belize national in 2005, so I am in fact an honorary Belizean. The diverse mix of Belizean culture is further reflected in my UK cultural background and like all other Belizeans who bring their culture to the mixing pot which make up Belize as a country. I would like to think that I strive to do the same, thereby becoming part of the community and culture of Belize. I chose Ladyville as the location for the centre due to the sense of community and also due to Ladyville, housing all cultures and classes of people of Belize. My role is as a facilitator of projects and programs which serve the people of Belize and are respectful of the diversity within the communities and cultures which co-exist."

**Miss Pamela:** "Within the near future, include ways that you think will improve the children's home and school?"

**Miss Marcelle:** "Regrettably, the future and growth of the children's home and school is dependent upon funds. The high cost of living in Belize is reflected in the running costs which are further impacted by international staff salaries.

We would of course be delighted to have highly qualified fulltime teachers and care-givers but must focus rather on training Belize nationals than hiring more international staff. The near future will involve a focus on projects which serve the most vulnerable within Belize, mainly those with learning and physical disabilities. Buildings will continue to be maintained and the kitchen at the school completed. The infirmary will be completed by mid-October. A visitor's centre is planning to be built which will, show case the children's art and sell vegetables, flowers and eggs which the centre's agricultural endeavors will produce. Re-defining the use of space is an on-going process and with the hiring of two new key members of staff, the campus will continue to strive to meet the demands placed upon it from the staff and most importantly the children."

**Miss Pamela:** "Pedagogically speaking, and in your opinion, what does a non-traditional learning environment mean to you?"

**Miss Marcelle:** "Having attended a Montessori school myself, I am able to comment on what elements of a non-traditional learning environment I deem to be most important. Essentially there must be a concrete theory on which to base the physical planning of the environment. Multifunctional and personalized spaces are what first come to mind when I



think of a non-traditional learning environment. The name of "Liberty" does in fact come directly from the idea of how children learn best by having freedom/liberty within a structure. The space must motivate, inspire and provoke further exploration; it must be an active space. Although child directed a non-traditional learning environment must involve collaboration."

**Miss Pamela:** "In your opinion, what are non-traditional approaches to learning?"

**Miss Marcelle:** "Both Montessori and Reggio methodologies have the common aim of creating harmony within the child and their environment in order to find meaning. To enable the child's search for meaning. Montessori and Reggio approach this quest from alternative angles. The idea of experimentation with Montessori equipment is enhanced with Reggio's documentation, causing the two approaches to be extremely complimentary to one another without jeopardizing the authenticity of either. This search for meaning is expressed by Carla Rinaldi, pedagoga and president of Reggio Children, "Documentation is a substantial part of the goal which has always characterized our experience: the search for meaning. To find the meaning of school, or rather, to construct the meaning of school, as a place which plays an active role in the children's search for meaning

and our own search for meaning (and shared meanings)”

**Miss Pamela:** “Within the context of institutionalization, how do you see two non-traditional learning philosophies (Montessori and Reggio Emilia) working within a post-colonial structured country?”

**Miss Marcelle:** “Within the context of the Belize project, using both approaches creates a harmonious balance which is achieved through both similarities and the differences. The scientific approach which Montessori adopts which functions to control the environment and not the child, is focused on the educational environment. Montessori is concerned with a more inward approach to create self discipline, one of order and attachment to reality. Reggio on the other hand takes the child into a more open space of exploration and self discovery; outward into the community.”

**Miss Pamela:** “Organizationally speaking, and in your opinion, how will the organizational structure of the children’s home and school coincide?”

**Miss Marcelle:** “The highest priority with regard to the running of the children’s home and school at Liberty is and always will be first and foremost the respect for the child. The educational principles of Montessori, Reggio and Pikler inspired and formed the foundation of Liberty Children’s Centre and as a consequence both the home and school will

continue to co-exist and learn and develop from one another. Due to the close proximity between the home and the school together with the shared staff, these two programs run from the centre are in a unique position to learn and develop from one another. Problems that arise in one can be prevented within the other for example so long as communication and good management continues to improve and strengthen the links."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see the children's home and school functioning within the Belizean culture and community?"

**Miss Marcelle:** "The Liberty Children's Learning Centre continues to be welcomed by the community and this was reflected this year for Belize's Independence Day. Liberty was invited to have its own float during the celebrations involving staff, parents, children and neighbours alike helping with the preparations. The float was prominent with its exhibition of art work and the talents of the children as it took its place as a very accepted and welcomed part of the Ladyville landscape."

**Miss Pamela:** "In your opinion, briefly discuss future goals and plans for the children's home and school?"

**Miss Marcelle:** "Liberty Learning Centre opened its doors to the first children in August 2005 and is therefore only in its toddler stage with respect to becoming all that it

possibly could. As any early childhood expert would know, trying to make a child run before it is ready can be damaging and so with regard to the direction in which Liberty should grow, we must be true to the principles upon which Liberty was founded. This involves being respectful and continuing to make observations before decisions are taken.

The future goals and plans for Liberty Learning Centre are not set in stone due to the young nature of the project and the requirement to be flexible in order to ensure that the correct direction is taken. Aside from funding restrictions, inviting people such as a researcher, Pamela Cook, with regard to the project as further developing and securing relationships with Government departments, listening to the staff, learning from similar institutions and taking into consideration the country and context in which we are working.

As an NGO which strives to help the most vulnerable we have a responsibility to ensure a more effective and collaborative delivery of services to the most vulnerable in Belize. Future plans are to develop further services for children with disabilities and help to promote the inclusion of such children into main stream education. Liberty Learning Centre is positioning itself as the "National

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education". The building of relationships with other NGO's, the University of Belize and the Ministry of Human Development and Education continues to dictate somewhat, the speed at which the centre be considered as being "fully fledged". The goal is for the centre to act as a model centre within the country where teachers can visit from the University and other schools and be exposed to the benefits of a non-traditional learning environment" (M. Delehay, personal communication, September 17, 2007).

Miss Veronica

(Belizean Board Member)

**Miss Pamela:** "As a board member, how do you feel about working within and around a non-traditional learning environment?"

**Miss Veronica:** "It is an adventure since it is not of our norm. They are in a safer and loving environment"

**Miss Pamela:** "What do you think about a children's home and school working together?"

**Miss Veronica:** "It is better." "I think it is ideal to know what to do and what not to do." "Bullies, teasing, fights, stealing and other mis-haps are avoided from happening."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you feel the children's home and school work well within the Belizean community and culture?"

**Miss Veronica:** "It is better in the aspect that there is one on one communication."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you feel about the learning progress of the children at Liberty?"

**Miss Veronica:** "Their health, education and state of mind even their emotional condition has greatly improved in comparison to when they first came. They were timid, uncontrollable, unhealthy, and afraid." "They are now well behaved, mannerly and curious to learn."

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you Miss Veronica, for your thoughts and for taking the time to answer these questions" (Miss Veronica, personal communication, June 2, 2007).

Miss Joanne

(LCH and LLC Director)

**Miss Pamela:** "Miss Joanne, administratively speaking, how does your role as the director of Liberty Children's Home and Liberty Learning Centre function within this organisational structure?"

**Miss Joanne:** "I was hired to coordinate, maintain and set up systems to implement and stabilize three things; the home, school and Parents as Teachers (PAT) program. This was the first objective. It took me half the time that was expected in the original business plan. This factor of growing too fast became a major problem with funding and

resources."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see yourself working in your role within the Belizean community and culture?"

**Miss Joanne:** "I believe that the focus has to be from more than one direction. There is the constant relationship building between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Human Development both in Belmopan. Then there is the local faction of these ministries in Belize City. The Department of Human Services has its main office there and most of their staff. Relationships here need constant attention and constant support. Liberty needs to trouble shoot or pin point needs and then clearly know its own resources.

On a different front there is a relationship with local school and city officials. This includes everyone from custom officers to teachers and principals of local schools including local merchants and suppliers. The most successful business is done in Belize is through building relationships and trust. Part of the job as director should be helping the community by talking to the people, attending meetings, and being available to discuss Liberty's mission. It also means becoming involved in other NGO's that are working in Belize."

**Miss Pamela:** "Within the near future, include ways that you

think will improve the children's home and school (new employee positions, buildings, etc.)?"

**Miss Joanne:** "The short ranged goals and long range goals are divided yet into other categories. There are facility needs, training needs, financial needs, staffing needs and community relationships. This all depends upon time, energy, and money. The biggest impact is to work toward a sustainable value to not only the clients but the management and staff. So it is Belizean people helping Belizean kids and families funded by a NGO." "The things that directly affect the children are on top of the list and then it is on from there. When thinking of improvements you have to consider the way you view the project are the children in the centre of the circle, the top of a pyramid, or the foundation."

**Miss Pamela:** "Pedagogically speaking and in your opinion, what does a non-traditional learning environment mean to you?"

**Miss Joanne:** "I think I have a traditional answer to the non-traditional approach. From within the Western cultures, a non-traditional approach to early childhood education would include methods such as: Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, and Montessori. As you broaden your view of education and look at it globally the pictures changes. So is having some



brightly painted shelves in one part of a grass hut with a packed sand floor where there are different dolls and clay pots in a remote island serving children of 2 or 3 tribes that would otherwise receive no preschool or 'formal education' non-traditional? If I worked in this situation, it would after a time become the standard and therefore traditional-it is all relative."

**Miss Pamela:** "What are non-traditional learning approaches to learning?"

**Miss Joanne:** "It might be more logical to look at education on a global basis. What is good for the children it embraces? First rule, know your clientele. I think that approaches that have standards and maintain policies, protocols, and procedures but get there using a road less traveled may be considered non-traditional. In any case, it is not a chapter in a book or a lecture. Non-traditional programs are designed and implemented through people that think creatively, putting children first, understanding child development, how children learn, and knowing instinctually how to demonstrate respect for life."

**Miss Pamela:** "Briefly discuss future goals and plans for the children's home and school?"

**Miss Joanne:** "After the phase of getting the construction done and passing the regulations and getting licenses, the

entire direction changes. At first it was making a huge splash and establishing the fact that Liberty was a reality and was going to make a long term commitment in Belize. Then it was working sort of both ends at the time. A top down and bottom up; working with important Belizean people, the Belizean ex-pat, foreign ex-pat, and the local people. Sort of securing and making a strong foundation for building an NGO that offers resources that will be productive to the population it is to serve." (Miss Joanne, personal communication, September 12, 2007).

Mrs. Tillett

(LLC School Principal)

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me something that you really enjoy here about this school?"

**Mrs. Tillett:** "First of all, I must say the kids are a priority! I enjoy them! I really like the kind of approach that we're having here. The Montessori approach, I really enjoy learning more about it. I noticed that the kids are learning a lot, and that makes me happy at the end of the day!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Mrs. Tillett, administratively speaking, and in your opinion, how is your role as a school principal function within this organizational structure (Children's Home and school)?"

**Mrs. Tillet:** "Personally, I feel that I own the school because I've been here since birth and then we were making baby steps and now we're walking."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see yourself working in your role within the Belizean community and culture?"

**Mrs. Tillet:** "I find community very involved. I feel like I never change. The parents of the school work 100% with me. Sometimes, they are short of fees and they try to participate in other things. We ask them to sell tickets and find out how much they can help. They are very much involved. Even, the people from the community work with me all the time."

**Miss Pamela:** "Within the near future, include ways that you think will improve the children's home and school (new employee positions, buildings, etc.)?"

**Mrs. Tillet:** "I think I want to do some parent education for single parents so that they can help their children more. I want to also help parents with generating income to better help their children."

**Miss Pamela:** "Mrs. Tillet, pedagogically speaking, and in your opinion, what does a non-traditional learning environment mean to you?"

**Mrs. Tillet:** "I am now a converted, Montessorian!" "At first, I wish I had known about Montessori a long time ago."

How much our children have progressed and how much they now compare to other children in our schools here. They are exposed to a lot of materials. Other teachers and children have said to me, "Look at what they have here, I wish we could come to this school!"

**Miss Pamela:** "In your opinion, what are non-traditional approaches to learning?"

**Mrs. Tillett:** "The traditional education which is about handling students the answers is no longer sufficient. This school will not follow the traditional approach. We believe that all children regardless of physical disabilities have the right to a sound education. As a principal, teacher, mother, and parent they will be treated as one." "This is different from traditional learning because the teacher is like a facilitator and guides the children. It is not the chalk-n-talk like traditional school. The children learn by doing their own actions, the teacher is a guide."

**Miss Pamela:** "In your opinion, what do you think of an orphanage school within a structured educational system using a non-traditional learning approach to the curriculum?"

**Mrs. Tillett:** "It is special. These children are underprivileged and for them to have their school is a way to bring them love and help them with their social and

emotional help for strength. We help them here!

**Miss Pamela:** "Within the context of institutionalization, how do you see two non-traditional learning philosophies (Montessori and Reggio Emilia) working together in a post-colonial structured country?"

**Mrs. Tillett:** "I like it because in every child is academically improved. I see some persons coming out. They express well to art and some of the children ask to go to the art studio area. We have a volunteer art studio teacher who works with the children."

**Miss Pamela:** "Mrs. Tillett, organizationally speaking, and in your opinion, how will the organizational structure of the children's home and school coincide (work together)?"

**Mrs. Tillett:** "The children at the home are on scholarships. They do not pay to come to school. One lady paid and made donations. It's free to them because it's really their school. But I asked the director if she could share with us. For example, the home provides materials or food items and cleaning supplies, etc."

**Miss Pamela:** "In your opinion, how can the learning improve here at Liberty Learning Centre?"

**Mrs. Tillett:** "LLC is going up! We intend to make it better! You find ways to work through weaknesses and turn to strength. Each year, we plan to improve ourselves

professionally." "I'm now taking my four teachers to the Preschool Association in Belize City for a monthly meeting. We only need to get transportation and buy our lunch. This is the last Friday of the month." "I go with them, and I read about Montessori materials. I'm teaching my staff on Thursday meetings lessons on how to better present lessons to the children."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see the children's home and school functioning within the Belizean community and culture?"

**Mrs. Tillet:** "Both community and school should work together because we are a part of the community. We attend community functions at public schools. We went to the police station and the village council pageant."

**Miss Pamela:** In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges for Liberty Learning Centre?"

**Mrs. Tillet:** "Financially, and I really need a substitute teacher." "It is difficult to find someone that will help or volunteer when my teachers are ill." "Also, it is difficult to find anyone that knows about non-traditional ways and Montessori."

**Miss Pamela:** "In your opinion, briefly discuss future goals and plans for the children's home and school?"

**Mrs. Tillet:** "We plan to work together on special events, and fundraising to help with the financial issue. We plan to

keep the school non-traditional."

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you, that is wonderful, Mrs. Tillett, you are doing such a lovely job at being an administrator of this school!"

**Mrs. Tillett:** "You're welcome!" (With a big smile)  
(D. Tillett, personal communication, March 8, 2007)

Miss Smirti

(Montessori Directress)

**Miss Pamela:** "Administratively speaking, and in your opinion, how does your role as the Montessorian Directress function within this organizational structure (Children's Home & School)?"

**Miss Smirti:** "I am involved mainly with Liberty Learning Centre. I feel that I have not really gotten into my role as yet as I have been caught up with administration and setting things in place so far (For example, Staff Handbooks, Reports, help writing letters, appraisal forms, etc.). From next week actually, I plan to be more in the classroom and hands on with the children. A huge part of this is because I will need to unpack and involve the children and teachers in using a school's worth of Montessori materials donated by an American lady. The shipment was meant to arrive in September and was rerouted and it has taken this long for me to get it."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see yourself working in your role within the Belizean Community and culture?"

**Miss Smirti:** "My role will be to direct children and also impart knowledge of the Montessori Method to my colleagues as teachers. I have already worked on the latter part quite a bit but I need to do more work with children directly. It is exciting and new as from my understanding, it is one of the first schools in Belize to be child-led and directed rather than the more traditional methods of teaching. So in this sense, I can see some barriers as already, when trying to explain how to do things, more group work with children rather than individual one-on-one attention is given. Also, methods of disciplining are not similar."

**Miss Pamela:** "Within the near future, include ways that you think will improve the children's home and school (new employee positions, buildings, etc.)?"

**Miss Smirti:** "Already, with the change of management, I see more positive changes and steps towards improvement. For example, we've had outside professionals come to train us on Discipline versus Punishment. A Social Worker also came to address the children on abuse and sexuality. There is more open communication. I would say more planning needs to be done and activities arranged for weekends and holidays as the children get bored just cooped up on the compound all



the time."

**Miss Pamela:** "Pedagogically speaking and in your opinion, what does a non-traditional learning environment mean to you?"

**Miss Smirti:** "This is child-centred led rather than adult led. Also, more focus on children engaging in activity and being active participants in the learning process rather than mere recipients. More freedom, less restrained, very creative, flexible and open!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Within the context of institutionalization, how do you see two non-traditional learning philosophies (Montessori & Reggio Emilia) working together within a post-colonial structured country?"

**Miss Smirti:** "I see LLC as providing great opportunities for the children who attend here, giving them a head start for their school career. Instilling self confidence and a love of learning is essential to this process."

**Miss Pamela:** "Organizationally speaking, and in your opinion, how will the organizational structure of the children's home and school coincide (working together)?"

**Miss Smirti:** "We come under one umbrella at the end of the day. We are answerable to the director and UK management (certainly International Staff) ultimately. Although there are separations, we overlap and also some personnel float

between LLC and LCH. I think that slowly, people are defining their roles and job descriptions are getting clearer which will make working life more effective."

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you see the children's home and school functioning within the Belizean Community and culture?"

**Miss Smirti:** "LLC offers a great service to the Belizean community, namely Ladyville. LCH as a forward thinking "out-of-the-box" place is also offering a lot to the Belizean community and culture. With respect to aligning with International trends, for example, working on de-institutionalization and developing foster care and adoption alternatives. Ultimately this will benefit the children in our care at the end of the day. Working in partnership with other stakeholders allows the changes to happen."

**Miss Pamela:** "Briefly discuss future goals and plans for the children's home and school?"

**Miss Smirti:** "The school continues to grow and improve. Right now, we are working on building a playground on-site for LLC. As far as the LCH is concerned, there is continual growth and change too. For example, a flower project will be started (headed by Miss Kari) in which we will grow and sell flowers in an effort to make ourselves more self sustainable. Also, in partnership with Care, Belize, program helping disabled and children with special needs will be

developed. Training and specialist service is key to these changes" (Miss Smirti, personal communication, November 15, 2007).

Miss Kari

(Artillerista)

**Miss Pamela:** "Miss Kari, tell me your thoughts of a non-traditional learning environment?"

**Miss Kari:** "I have to say that I've always been impressed with non-traditional education. From my own personal history in retrospect, had I been in a non-traditional school I would have excelled better. Umm . . . sitting traditionally as a child drove me insane and in college, I went into the Arts because I needed the physical action to trigger my brain, so that falls here at Liberty where we have children with emotional and physical developmental issues based upon their past life experiences and reasons why they are here at the Children's home.

It's a fabulous way of having children not separated because I think in a traditional school; I mean this as the State's Standards versus the British Colonial traditional school which would be more hard core versus the States and Canada where they're more relaxed and teachers use non-traditional ideas in traditional settings.

I think that the Colonial setting is very rigid and

regimented and there is not a lot of leeway with issues. In fact, a child who might be four years old emotionally and three years old physically and they act eight years old. In a school situation like this, that child is allowed to interact with those who can handle their actions and is introduced to activities that stimulate both emotional and physical from a three year old to bring to a 4 year old successfully mentally. In the States, if you're sitting in a class of 30 students, you're classified.

For instance, there is a two-year-old child here who is advanced and can manipulate very small materials. I saw this child sitting with an eight year old child who at times, acts like a 15 year old. This two-year-old sat for 45 minutes, interacted and learned counting and different things with another child which is unheard of in a traditional school.

As for the non-traditional school and Children's Home here, I think this is a wonderful idea because they're allowed to implement those non-traditional ideas outside the schools atmosphere where you can spontaneously learn and self pace yourself outside the school that can heal emotionally and physically.

As Liberty goes, I think it is absolutely essential. We are dealing with children with emotional and physical

problems and it's more geared toward that. I think that non-traditional Montessori education is absolutely imperative because of the children's situations (Miss Kari, personal communication, May 10, 2007).

#### Toddler Teachers

(Two Year Old Teachers)

(Miss Lavita, Miss Karla, Miss Gladys, Miss Whitney)

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me what you think of a non-traditional teaching environment here at Liberty Learning Centre?"

**Miss Lavita:** "Our thoughts of a non-traditional learning environment."

**Miss Gladys:** "The child is free to choose an activity that he or she wants to do."

**Miss Whitney:** "The child has the opportunity to do what they want to achieve."

**Miss Karla:** "The child is free to think and do their own learning."

**Miss Lavita:** "The child explores instead of using books, we use activities like manipulatives and building blocks."

**Miss Gladys:** "The child has the opportunity to explore creative what he or she is doing."

**Miss Lavita:** "Equipping the classrooms, organizing the classrooms, encouraging the child."

**Miss Gladys:** "The classroom has space to explore the

environment in what they are doing."

**Miss Karla:** "We need more educational tools"

**Miss Pamela:** "Very nice and thank-you for your comments as to a non-traditional learning environment" (LLC Toddler Teachers, personal communication, March 8, 2007).

#### Preschool Teachers

(Three and Four Year Old Teachers)

(Miss Yolanda, Miss Emilda and Mr. David)

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me what you think about teaching in a non-traditional learning environment?"

**Miss Yolanda:** "For me, non-traditional learning, I find it fine and some children, I know are learning.

**Miss Emilda:** "For me, non-traditional ways is very good because actually, what I was brought up at a early stage of teaching then was to push them. So by doing and just guiding them and not teaching them, they learn a lot better!"

**Mr. David:** "It's interesting and it's great, not only they work with it, they are more interested in it.

**Miss Pamela:** Tell me what you think about non-traditional teaching?"

**Miss Emilda:** "At a normal traditional school teachers push them and you can't do this and you can't do that." In a Montessori School, you can work at your own pace."

**Miss Yolanda:** "A child can do on, their own. You can be

amazed to see, watching them."

**Miss Emilda:** "Actually, I think in a Montessori School, they always have something to do. You can always do something else." "It occupies their minds without pen and paper!"

**Miss Yolanda:** "Children here are blessed!" "To have a home here and a school here, this environment is perfect for everyone!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you teachers for your time and giving your thoughts on a non-traditional learning environment" (LLC, Preschool Teachers, personal communication, March 8, 2007).

Mrs. Price

(LCH Office Staff and LLC School Secretary)

**Miss Pamela:** "Mrs. Price, tell me about your job at Liberty Learning Centre, and what you have enjoyed the most?"

**Mrs. Price:** "I am the office and school secretary. I have enjoyed my time here at Liberty. I think the children have progressed and learned a lot from the type of teaching they are receiving. Ummm . . . the teachers should be complimented! It's nice to watch them walking around the non-traditional learning environment. Ummm . . . it is unusual. It's different than from what we are used to. The kids have learned a lot and have expressed themselves because they have the opportunity and have benefited to the

type of teaching they are receiving."

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you, Mrs. Price for your time" (J. Price, personal communication, March 8, 2007).

Miss Audrey

(Infant Care-giver)

**Miss Pamela:** "Hello Miss Audrey, can you tell me some things that you really like about working here at Liberty?"

**Miss Audrey:** "When I come in the mornings, even if they have their bottles hangin, things are worthwhile! That encourages me to come every morning with their smiles on their faces."

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me something really exciting that has happened with the infants?"

**Miss Audrey:** "Once Briana was tryin to walk. She was trying to climb up and then pop, she fell on the carpet!" (Miss Audrey laughs) She's only a year and a half. She's the smallest one, and then she began to walk!"

**Miss Pamela:** "It's nice to see the infants when they begin to walk, right?"

**Miss Audrey:** "Yes! (Shaking her head and smiling)"

**Miss Pamela:** "As a caregiver, how do you feel about working within a non-traditional learning environment?"

**Miss Audrey:** "Being a caregiver at Liberty Foundation for the past two years, I found it to be a challenge."

**Miss Pamela:** "What do you think about a children's home and



school working together?"

**Miss Audrey:** "I've never thought it possible to come so far. Through our time the children of Liberty have taught me more patience and understanding. I've seen the physical scars, but as harsh and cruel and unjust as it is, I looked deeper, beyond the surface and discovered a spark of light, hope and a heart yearning to be loved. Working, playing and being with them as they open up to me like the first flower of spring. Seeing a faint smile, tells me I'm doing something right. Of all the abuse and physical pain they went through their SPIRITS ARE NOT BROKEN.

**Miss Pamela:** "How do you feel about the progress of the children at Liberty?"

**Miss Audrey:** "They have come so far and still have a long way to go and as their caregiver, I'm proud to be the one to help them through it, to hold their hands across this massive roaring river. I don't know how to "sum up" how I feel in one word but one thing I know, they are all survivors and I love them! God, continue to bless them!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?"

**Miss Audrey:** "Ummm . . . you're surrounded by lots of people who care in a good, healthy environment!" "Things are very happy here!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Great! Thank-you, Miss Audrey, for your time."

**Miss Audrey:** "You're welcome" (A. Card, personal communication, June 6, 2007).

Miss Rosa

(Infant and Toddler Care-giver)

**Miss Pamela:** Tell me something that you like while working here at Liberty?"

**Miss Rosa:** "I like the children!"

**Miss Pamela:** "What do you like to do the best with the children?"

**Miss Rosa:** "I like working here, a lot!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me something that you enjoy while working with the infants?"

**Miss Rosa:** "I like to help the children learn to walk!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you, Miss Rosa, I appreciate you, and taking the time to share with me!" (Miss Rosa, personal communication, March 15, 2007).

Miss Natalie and Daughter, Miss Pamela

(Night Supervisor and Preschool Evening Girls Care-giver)

**Miss Pamela:** "Can you tell me what you like best about working here at Liberty Children's Home?"

**Miss Natalie:** "It's a great place and I have a great time here at Liberty!" "I love these children, very much!"

**Miss Pamela:** "I can see that. Tell me what you do here at

Liberty?"

**Miss Natalie:** "I just like to keep everyone happy with clean food, rooms kept clean. You have to soap it up!" And, there are a lot of challenges."

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me about your job and the challenges?"

**Miss Natalie:** "I'm the night supervisor, and I can work with everybody to make sure that everything is working and clean and nicely."

**Miss Pamela:** "That is great!" Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?"

**Miss Natalie:** "I like the children, and taking care of the kids, walks, giving them food to eat and I just like everything!" "I really love working here and I'll work here always!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you, Miss Natalie!" "Miss Pamela, can you tell me what you do here at Liberty?"

**Miss Natalie's Daughter, Miss Pamela:** "I like working here at Liberty and being here with the kids!" "I like showing them that I love them!" (Showing a huge smile, as she leaves to go work with the children)

**Miss Pamela:** "Great! I can see that both of you take such good care of the children" (LLC Staff, Miss Natalie and Miss Pamela, personal communication, March 15, 2007).

Mr. Patrick

(Evening Boys Care-giver)

**Miss Pamela:** "Mr. Patrick, can you tell me why you like working here with the young boys at Liberty Children's Home?"

**Mr. Patrick:** "Well, I really enjoy my job!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Why, do you really enjoy this job?"

**Mr. Patrick:** "I like teaching them stuff."

**Miss Pamela:** "And, I noticed you like to play different games and games outside?"

**Mr. Patrick:** "Yeah!"

**Miss Pamela:** "The other day, I saw you playing with the dog."

**Mr. Patrick:** "Yeah!"

**Miss Pamela:** "What are some exciting things that you do with the children?" "I know they have a lot of fun with you!"

**Mr. Patrick:** "Yeah!" "I like to read stories and run around like a little kid too!" "Most of the time, but when they do bad stuff, they get timeout!" "I try to make the bad stuff go away!" (Mr. Patrick smiles. . .)

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you very, very much!"

**Mr. Patrick:** (Nodding his head) "You're welcome!" (Mr. Patrick, personal communication, March 20, 2007).

Mr. Stevie and Mr. Angel

(Grounds Care-takers)

**Miss Pamela:** "Mr. Stevie, tell me about your job here at Liberty?"

**Mr. Stevie:** "I'm right here cleaning up the lawns and the foundation."

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me more about working here at Liberty and the things that you do with the children?"

**Mr. Stevie:** "My job is keeping them happy! My best buddies, Rosa and Delroy, they work with us on Fridays. They help us rack up the leaves, go on walks. Well . . . we get the place cleaned up, selling the vegetables. All the kids are very happy when we are here. Angel is our best friend! We like Angel!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Mr. Angel, tell me a few things about working here at Liberty?"

**Mr. Angel:** "Well, it's fun, great, and nice to be around the kids!"

**Miss Pamela:** "That's good!" "What kinds of things do you like to do or you like most about your job here at Liberty while working within a non-traditional learning environment?"

**Mr. Angel:** "Spending time with the kids!" "I feel like a, "pa pa", to the kids!" "On Fridays, we dance, and sing with the kids!" "We take them out, so Stevie and I we spend time

with them." "Every Friday, we spend time with them."

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you Mr. Angel, and Mr. Stevie, for taking time to spend with these children! That is great! That is why this place is a great place to be non-traditional" (Mr. Stevie and Mr. Angel, personal communication, March 28, 2007).

Mr. Price

(Grounds Maintenance)

**Miss Pamela:** "Mr. Price, is there anything that you would like to say about working here at the school and the type of non-traditional environment that is here?"

**Mr. Price:** "Well . . . working here at Liberty Foundation and Liberty Children's Home has been a real challenge. Since you're working with kids, you know there's much to do or little to do. And, sometimes when you think about having a good day that is when it becomes a busy day." "I will never say that you will not have a great day because there is always something popping up. However, the bottom line is that at the end of the day, you feel satisfied and whatever you ventured to do is completed and everyone is happy, you can go about looking forward to another day feeling that you accomplished much and your job was well completed."

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank you, Mr. Price." "Those are really good words of encouragement."

**Mr. Price:** "You're welcome" (G. Price, personal communication, March 25, 2007).

Miss Yolanda

(Daytime Cook)

**Miss Pamela:** "Miss Yolanda, tell me what you think of working at Liberty?"

**Miss Yolanda:** I cook, this is a special job. I love the food, people in the environment, I love the WHOLE environment! The kids are organized and are very nice!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Good!" "That's very nice!" "Thank-you, Miss Yolanda" (LCH staff, Miss Yolanda, personal communication, June 5, 2007).

Miss Louise

(Evening Cook)

**Miss Pamela:** "Miss Louise, tell me what you like to do the best at Liberty?"

**Miss Louise:** "I like to cook." I've had my own business."

**Miss Pamela:** "What kind of business, did you have?"

**Miss Louise:** "I cook food, lots of different things, come by my place down the road and I will cook for you, too."

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you, Miss Louise, for the invite and I would love to come and visit your business." "I understand that you also cook for the school, can you tell me what you think of this type of school, a non-traditional type of

school?"

**Miss Louise:** "I think it's good." "My grandson goes here and he knows who the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education is." "My grandson will be ready for Infant I (Kindergarten)." "It is better than some of the preschools in the city" "I think the teachers have it hard financially. They need more money to help. They have to do a lot by themselves."

**Miss Pamela:** "Can you explain more about what the teachers need to do?"

**Miss Louise:** "If I do not cook, then the teachers have to cook and clean the school. They need more helpers and supplies, like food and cleaning stuff like Clorox bleach."

**Miss Pamela:** "Are you saying that there needs to be more volunteers to help with the school?"

**Miss Louise:** "I think that if there is more money to help pay people to work at the school."

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you Miss Louise for sharing your thoughts of the school" (LCH Staff, Miss Louise, personal communication, March 20, 2007).

Miss Deborah

(Custodial)

**Miss Pamela:** "Tell me some exciting things you enjoy while you are working here at Liberty Children's Home?"



**Miss Deborah:** "Well, ok, some things, definitely the children, and the beautiful scenes (as she waves her hand to show me the trees, etc.) Different types of animals, birds chirping and neighborhood friends. Also, I love the cleaning!"

**Miss Pamela:** "I see that, you have a broom in your hands."

**Miss Deborah:** "Yes, it's like a passion, you know?"

**Miss Pamela:** "Well, that is good." "What else would you like to tell me?"

**Miss Deborah:** "And ummm. . . some of the things. The children, the beautiful surroundings . . . and neighbors. Sometimes, I set at the window and look at the scenes, the squirrels running up the trees. It gives me a great feeling inside. And, my cleaning job!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Wonderful, is there anything else?"

**Miss Deborah:** "Yes, ummm . . . I was mentioning, you can hear the birds chirping over our heads, the wonderful scenes and ummm . . . the wonderful and marvelous creations from God, the butterflies, that's a wonderful feeling and also I'm privileged to be working here with the children and the staff. How are you enjoying yourself here?"

Miss Pamela: "Oh, I'm thoroughly enjoying myself!" "Thank-you, Miss Deborah, for your time"(LCH Staff, Miss Deborah, personal communication, March 20, 2007).

Miss Evangie

(Laundry)

**Miss Pamela:** "Miss Evangie, tell me about working here at Liberty, and what exactly do you do?"

**Miss Evangie:** "Well, at Liberty, I do the laundry and sometimes I cook a little piece of food. I mend, and I like to help."

**Miss Pamela:** "Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?"

**Miss Evangie:** "I enjoy working here because if I was working somewhere else in the sun . . . hot. Here, I'm in the shade.

**Miss Pamela:** "Miss Evangie, tell me what you think of a non-traditional learning environment?"

**Miss Evangie:** "It's good." "Even though, the day is hot, I really like the environment of this place!"

**Miss Pamela:** "Thank-you Miss Evangie, for your time."

**Miss Evangie:** "You're welcome" (LCH Staff, Miss Evangie, Personal communication, March 20, 2007).

### Personal Analysis

The analysis of the administration, teacher responses were found to be direct and to the point of the questions asked. There is a vision here at liberty which shows a great amount of cooperation and understanding. Time and money are factors in this setting and in this situation; it tends to be an ongoing challenge. This continues to improve as to what has already been established through consistent funding projects, NGO's and professional development experiences.

As far as a non-traditional type of learning environment in a developing country, the responses indicate positively that it is working in this setting. Obviously, the staff here has an understanding toward the newly adapted curriculum approaches that have been implemented. It is understood that the people working at Liberty will continue to make things workable in this environment.

The care-giver staff responses were short conversations however, informative as to their specific daily job duties regarding the care that is given toward the children. I observed the care-givers bathe children regularly, dress children with clean clothes, and demand that children's manners be respectful to other care-givers, staff and visitors. The caregivers enjoyed their jobs, as several stated, "I love my job here at Liberty!" and "I want to work

here, always!" as they continued working. The Belizean's work very hard with their jobs as they take pride in whatever they are doing as the atmosphere of the campus is genuinely in high spirits.

As the care-taker staff responses were analyzed and interpreted, they were specific, regarding their own particular jobs and less opinionated. Having the campus manually cared for through the artistry, beauty and tidiness of the physical grounds caretaking staff simply added to the contentment displayed throughout Liberty campus.

The living domes were swept and mopped daily with equipment in good working repair. As Miss Deborah commented, with a broom in her hand, "I love the cleaning!" Miss Natalie shared how the food and the children are kept clean "Nutritious fresh food is prepared and served three times a day (including snacks) as the children's clothes and bedding are laundered and hung to dry on a regular basis.

Liberty's staff works on three separate shifts, utilizing an organized method of working in their own structured job routine of flexibility and freedom in this type of institutionalized environment. It is evident that the staff cares for the children in a wide variety of ways that offers a sense of pride and uniqueness of being a different kind of unique work place and learning

environment. In some cases, the staff spends an extra amount of quality time with the children simply by dancing, playing games, or going on walks by the sea. Magda Gerber once said, "In time, not on time" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004, p. 3).

Liberty is a special place because of the uplifting voices and helping hands of the peoples working together which allow for it to be organizationally feasible. Liberty's disposition has a bright, sunny and homey atmosphere, from the smiles on the faces of the adults and from the children that live and work there.

I observed children at Liberty to be at ease as they jumped on the play yard equipment ran around the school and played throughout the campus grounds. Director, Joanne Rahn commented, "We have children from ten months to nine years. We have happy children with glowing faces who love to run, who love to play, who love to smile, who love to participate, who are very excited about a new school" (J. Rahn, personal communication, September 19, 2006).

It was evident from these observations that the children living at Liberty are well cared for, nurtured and loved. The implementation of the Pikler approach and methods of care giving is an important feature that I observed in the primary care-giving infant and toddler areas and literally throughout the campus. This was, and is designed

to essentially promote attachment in addition to enhancing individual identity formations (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004).

#### Summary

The LCH and LLC community shared their artifacts, feelings, thoughts and ideas including: funny stories, poetry and personal experiences while working in an international and institutionalized environmental setting. The Belizean culture essentially provided a way for me to gain a much better understanding of their cultural ways of learning.

It is through Belizean ways, that I have learned different and diverse ways of knowing and learning in the teaching and learning process. My intent is for hope, with a determined drive that will empower the Belizean culture to take what has already been learned and taught; to allow others the opportunity to participate and live in a diverse and ethnic culture.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONCLUSION, SUMMARY

## Discussion

This discussion centers on the responses that have been documented. These were words that were inspired by students, teachers and staff members. These responses were given to me directly and indirectly; as observations were documented and interpreted. It is helpful and hopeful, that the responses from the participants will set forth a tone that encourages and empowers early childhood educationalists toward early learning research, within the context of institutionalized and international early learning environments throughout the world.

I would like to also think of this study, as Leggo (2004) refers to poetry as, "A curriculum of joy that is lived and is living, always generated by questing and questioning, by searching and researching" (p. 32). That is to point out that these responses have been given from individuals that were curious and joyful as the peoples of the culture wanted to be involved in their community of learning together.

## Limitations

Several limitations of this study are discussed as follows:

One limitation of this study involved the transcription of interviews. That is, approximately one percent of the words were lost or slightly skewed because I was unable, to translate from a few of the local dialects.

Another limitation consisted of the background of the children. I was unable, because of confidentiality restrictions, to meet the parents of the children that had been orphaned; therefore, it was difficult for me to fully understand all of the school-age children's ethnic backgrounds and natural environments. However, I began to understand that to gain the children's trust would take some time. It took several weeks from the beginning of my visit, to develop a conversation and dialog with the students. I was reassured by the administration of Liberty that many of the children that have been orphaned need time to gain trust with visiting adults (J. Rahn, personal communication, February 20, 2007; D. Martinovich; D. Tillett, personal communication, February 25, 2007). Approximately four weeks into the study my conversations and dialogs with the children began to surface on a regular basis.



I noticed very quickly that the climate of Belize was extremely hot; especially, on those heavy rain days that complicated technology and the function of my equipment (digital camera, camcorder, computer and tape recorder. Therefore, some photography, interviews and written observations may have been interrupted or lost due to constant changing of batteries and outages of electricity and internet.

As I immersed myself into the foreign culture for 17-weeks, my body changed due to the adjustment of food, heat and caused some nausea. There were moments that I was unable to observe children and staff for over an hour and long periods of time within the penetrating hot sun. Due to these situations, some of my interviews or observations may have been disrupted or lost.

I learned to change my interview schedule to be more flexible due to the children's home, community of Ladyville and the school's routines and schedules. The working time schedules were set according to the staff and families living within the community to their businesses and work schedules. I eventually grew accustomed to the Belizean siesta (afternoon break) which many of the small businesses closed from 1:00 to 4:00pm; reopening until 7:00pm. Some of

my scheduled interviews may have been rearranged and lost due to time changes.

### Implications

The findings of my study are three fold:

1. Practices in the classroom learning environment were individualized to meet each child's ability to meet the Belizean Academic Standards.
2. The natural learning environment changed with the interests from the child.
3. Future research of early learning from the perspectives of a developing country.

### Classroom Practice

The classroom practices changed every day. One reason primarily was because the school-age students were diverse regarding learning styles. Every child that came into the program was dealing with some type of challenge in the teaching and learning process (D. Martinovich, personal communication, February 15, 2007). This was also due to the multi-age levels of the students ranging from five to nine years of age. This is very typical in a Montessori classroom as discussed in chapter four.

Within a non-traditional early learning environment, practices change regularly due to the academic focus of each individual child. Montessori classrooms include seven academic subject areas that often change the classroom learning materials and manipulatives from one week to the next as the students have opportunity to build upon the last task successfully (North American Montessori Handbook, 2006).

#### Future Research

The future research plans from this study have prompted me to further my studies as follows:

(1) A continuation of this study: I have been invited back to Liberty, in Ladyville, Belize anytime that my schedule permits to conduct further research. I would like to travel back to Belize on a regular basis, as to follow-up with the academic progress of the school-age students for several years (possibly 5+ years). This plan will encompass a continuation of observation, documentation and interpretation. I will also continue writing articles that address the student's responses of their progress through the academic changes by attending a non-traditional school that uses non-traditional approaches and learning environment. I am currently in the process of making

arrangements with Liberty Foundation, Preschool Association and the University of Belize to continue a longitudinal case study.

(2) Writing a Textbook: I was inspired through Liberty's campus, school and learning environment in Ladyville and surrounding areas of Belize.

The warmth and beauty of Belize itself is quite captivating. I wish that every child could experience learning in an environment that is conducive to a young child's curiosity of life and learning. It was through the essence of this study that has inspired me to consider writing a textbook that regards non-traditional early learning environments with a focus on how learning unfolds, naturally using specific learning spaces.

(3) Classroom Tool: I would like to develop a classroom instrument or tool that allows children the ability to learn "naturally" in the classroom learning environment. The plan is to design an Individualized Study Plan (ISP); an instrumental tool designed for teachers, which utilizes insights from Belizean teachers to use in the classroom for all young children (Grades pre/k - Grade 3).

This classroom tool guide may become a helpful

instructional strategy that will guide teachers to transform their learning spaces and environments while meeting the individualized learning styles of young children in their classrooms and in diverse situations.

#### Reflections on Research Process

Upon revisiting Howard Gardner's (Edwards, et. al, 1995; cited in Valentine, 2001, p. 15) warning:

It is a mistake to take any approach and assume like a flower you can take it from one soil and put it in another one. That never works. We have to figure out what aspects of that are most important to us and what kind of soil we need to make those aspects grow. (p. 15)

The question here is coming from an institutionalized and international situation, "How can we transplant a curriculum from one place and plant it in another soil?" (cited in Valentine, 2001, p. 15). My explanation to this is that, no, we cannot just take a curriculum that works in one place and assume it will be successful in another. Moreover, to follow Gardner's analogy, a plant grown on foreign soil will naturally develop a unique profile suited to its own environment, if it is to thrive. Thus, the same is true of educational strategies.

The best way to do this is to modify and implement the curricula in such a tailored way, that is, socio-culturally appropriate and individually conducive for healthy growth and development of children from a variety of backgrounds and situations.

From the documented responses and observations, I found my interpretations to correlate well with Gardner's statement. Essentially, the Belizeans taught us that we can appropriate curricula to be placed and implemented in a diverse learning environment which can potentially allow us to utilize best practices from around the world. LLC essentially took those pieces from each foreign curriculum approach by looking at their own learning environment and the natural ways of the Belizean culture. For Liberty, that was the best way possible to implement pieces from three approaches to be "planted" into their soil. It is thru the help of the students, teachers and staff that continue to "water and fertilize" the soil which will help make their plants grow.

I have found through this experience that natural learning strategies and natural environments are "key" to the success of growth. For other cultures, it may be best to look first at what needs to be changed in their own teaching

instructional strategies and the classroom learning environment. That will help diverse cultures begin to explore new ways to plant their own plants and see them grow.

### Conclusions

The conclusion of my research study perhaps is one of the causes for the educational pendulum to swing toward more of a social-constructivist, instructional learning base environment. This may be due in part through many educational frustrations that are possibly occurring today (Jones, et. al., 2000).

Could it be fear and intimidation from governmental education departments, ministries of education or school administrators which cause a driving force behind classrooms that are too structured? Are too many teachers using teaching strategies that are lured into becoming product oriented robots? Is it federally funded programs or allocated monies, a leading factor that dictate to teaching institutions dollar increases for high-stakes testing?

However problematic these issues may be, the question still stands. Will the educational pendulum ever stop swinging? There are indeed school administrators, educators, instructors, teachers, and international teachers that

continue to discover long-term benefits of diverse learning methodologies that are improving children's learning experiences.

It was more than a century ago that Dorothy Gardner (1942) attempted to put to rest this very same controversy. She conducted a comparative study of two nursery schools. School A would be referred to as a "child-directed" program and School B would be considered a "Teacher-directed" program. Gardner's findings were in favor of School A (Katz, 2000). Also, in the past 20 years, similar comparative studies have been documented. Katz (2000, p.3) lists a few (Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983; Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997; Marcon, 1992, 1995).

Katz explains that most of these studies have been somewhat mixed however, generally close to Garner's earlier findings those children enrolled in preschools on the social-constructivist side of the dichotomy did much better in school, and especially boys (p. 3).

Nevertheless, there needs to be consideration for a caring pedagogy in a differentiated learning environment or the implementation of a project oriented approach. Whatever the case might be, early learning researchers need to



discover other ways of using diverse methodologies that captivate and encourage teachers' to revisit instructional teaching styles that will meet children's needs individually and naturally.

From this research study, I have discovered that by utilizing selected instructional techniques that may be traditional, along with non-traditional innovative strategies, and an open-ended learning environment will together create a relaxed classroom for many diverse situations. It is good for learning environments to change from a more structured environment to a less structured environment that is more desirable, helpful and useful.

While staying in Belize, I observed the Belizean Preschool Association, Ministry of Education and the University of Belize Early Childhood Program interested and supportive toward Liberty Learning Centre's non-traditional learning environment (J. Rahn, personal communication, February 15, 2007; P. Lopez, University of Belize, personal communication, May 10, 2007).

It is time for all early learning educationalists to recognize and understand that if children are going to be successful in any culture or society, they must take a stand for learning experiences filled with reciprocity and

mutuality (Tappan, 1998). Cooper (2004) writes, "Only by raising awareness and radically altering the context in which genuine care work, can we improve the personal, social, moral and academic development of future generations" (p. 21).

These choices are available to make an effort to explore individualized learning methodologies in diverse and unique learning environments. Moreover, if indeed developing countries are attempting to make change, let us learn from them and gain a better understanding of how to share our knowledge by exploring new ways to support diverse learning styles in our own educational systems.

Once again, I thought it appropriate to share two additional poems from Mr. Price. Hoogland (2004) refers to, "Poetry as the most heightened use of literary verbal structures that thrive on immediacy, multiplicity of meaning, colour, sound and other sensory data, emotion, and images of the concrete, material world" (p. 43).

#### MY WEEK AT CAMP

We were all like special pilgrim  
 In a little foreign place  
 And all of us were waiting  
 For God to show his grace

It started, Oh on Monday  
And went all through the week  
And when it finally ended  
We say it was so sweet

The direction blow his whistle  
To keep us in the way  
And when he summon the instruction  
He expects us to obey

The cooks they played their part  
And of course they were fine  
For you could see the faces  
Of the campers at eating time  
There many many emotion  
Of which the campers share  
And some just could not help it  
They had to shed their tear  
It happen all so quickly  
The time has come to depart  
So we cherish every moment  
And kept them in our hearts

(G. Price, personal communication, May 30, 2007)

### Summary of Study

I believe my experiences at LCH and LLC were so much more than just a mere week at summer camp. These experiences resulted in four months in a diverse culture of the world. This study essentially included; a campus, an orphanage home, a strong community of diverse people committed to loving and caring for the way [non-traditionally] these children learn best.

I will never forget the ecologically secured yellow dome living spaces, (my home) and the octagon shaped open-style learning centre (school). Of course, this was where I spent most of my time. However, many friendships were established and relationships were built upon these daily interactions with the administration, teachers, staff, students, care-givers and the campus children.

It is because of the peoples of Ladyville, Belize and also including: Liberty Foundation of England, Belizean Preschool Association, Ministry of Education and the University of Belize and the surrounding community around the campus of Liberty, that I am a better person for having had this opportunity. I have been invited to return to Ladyville and especially Liberty Children's Home. I would be honoured to see my new found friends once again.

Mr. Price said to me one bright and sunny day, *"Thank-you, Miss Pamela, it is through you that I have opportunity; my voice will be heard!"* (G. Price, personal communication, June 8, 2007). I believe this statement signifies a rich part in validating this research study. Indeed, I have had an opportunity to share with those who have been silent and voiceless, and to let their voices be heard. Thank you Mr. Price, and all of my new found friends at Liberty, for showing me how to find, my desires in life. My experiences at Liberty, have only taught me to treasure every minute and moment for which I have captured in my thoughts for years to come.

#### IT IS MY DESIRE

To live my life and make good choices;

To live my life and avoid the strife.

To live my life and don't do drugs;

To live my life and just give hugs.

(It's my desire)

To love my family and give them all;

To love my family and keep them from fall.

To love my wife as much as I could;

To love my children as a father should.

(It's my desire)

To love my country and share the best;  
To love my country with its test.  
To love my country and this I plea;  
To love my country with others like me.  
(It's my desire)

To love my God because he's good;  
To love my God as a person should.  
To love my God with a humble heart;  
To love my God right from the start.  
(It's my desire)

It's my desire to learn new things;  
And get the joy that knowledge brings.  
To share its difference with those who care;  
And celebrate its victory everywhere.  
(It's my desire)

To leave a good example to those I know;  
To leave a good example to those I show.  
To leave a good example though I have past;  
To leave a good example regardless the cost  
(G. Price, personal communication, May 30, 2007).

And, the journey continues . . .

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A



Kensington Charity Centre, Charles House  
375 Kensington High Street, London, W14 8QH

T: 020 7341 7341

F: 020 7341 7241

[www.libertyfoundation.org.uk](http://www.libertyfoundation.org.uk)  
[info@libertyfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@libertyfoundation.org.uk)

27 December 2006

Pamela R. Cook, PhD candidate  
4665 Riverside Drive East  
Windsor, Ontario, Canada N8Y 4S8

Dear Pamela:

We're delighted that you plan to return to Liberty Children's Home in Ladyville, Belize, to further your research for your critical ethnography, and we hereby extend a formal invitation from Liberty Foundation for you to do so.

We look forward to receiving details of your travel plans and to having you visit us again. If we can be of any assistance in the meantime, please don't hesitate to let us know.

All the best,

Ambrose Lovely  
Site Manager  
Liberty Children's Home

## APPENDIX B



Today's Date: January 26, 2007  
 Principal Investigator: Ms. Pamela Cook  
 Department/School: Education  
 REB Number: 07-009  
 Research Project Title: Student and teacher responses to non-traditional approaches within an institutionalised learning context of Belize, Central America: a critical ethnography  
 Clearance Date: January 22, 2007  
 Project End Date: December 31, 2007  
 Progress Report Due:  
 Final Report Due: December 31, 2007

This is to inform you that the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB), which is organized and operated according to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* and the University of Windsor *Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects*, has granted approval to your research project on the date noted above. This approval is valid only until the Project End Date.

A Progress Report or Final Report is due by the date noted above. The REB may ask for monitoring information at some time during the project's approval period.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. Minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered when submitted on the Request to Revise form.

Investigators must also report promptly to the REB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

Forms for submissions, notifications, or changes are available on the REB website: [www.uwindsor.ca/reb](http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb). If your data is going to be used for another project, it is necessary to submit another application to the REB.

We wish you every success in your research.

*Maureen Muldoon*

Maureen Muldoon, Ph.D.  
 Chair, Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Andrew Allen, Education  
 Linda Bunn, Research Ethics Coordinator

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

## APPENDIX C

Office of the Research Ethics Board



Today's Date: January 21, 2008  
 Principal Investigator: Ms. Pamela Cook  
 Department/School: Education  
 REB Number: 07-009  
 Research Project Title: Student and teacher responses to non-traditional approaches within an institutionalised learning context of Belize, Central America: a critical ethnography  
 Clearance Date: January 22, 2007  
 Project End Date: December 31, 2008  
 Progress Report Due: December 31, 2007  
 Final Report Due: December 31, 2008

This is to inform you that the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB), which is organized and operated according to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* and the University of Windsor *Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects*, has granted approval to your research project on the date noted above. This approval is valid only until the Project End Date.

A Progress Report or Final Report is due by the date noted above. The REB may ask for monitoring information at some time during the project's approval period.

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Investigators must also report promptly to the REB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

Forms for submissions, notifications, or changes are available on the REB website: [www.uwindsor.ca/reb](http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb). If your data is going to be used for another project, it is necessary to submit another application to the REB.

We wish you every success in your research.

*Dr. Maureen Muldoon*

Maureen Muldoon, Ph.D.  
Chair, Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Andrew Allen, Education  
Mark Curran, Research Ethics Coordinator

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.



## APPENDIX D

Office of the Research Ethics Board



Today's Date: January 5, 2009  
 Principal Investigator: Ms. Pamela Cook  
 Department/School: Education  
 REB Number: 07-009  
 Research Project Title: Student and teacher responses to non-traditional approaches within an institutionalised learning context of Belize, Central America: a critical ethnography  
 Clearance Date: January 22, 2007  
 Project End Date: December 31, 2009  
 Progress Report Due: December 31, 2007; December 31, 2008  
 Final Report Due: December 31, 2009

This is to inform you that the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB), which is organized and operated according to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* and the University of Windsor *Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects*, has granted approval to your research project on the date noted above. This approval is valid only until the Project End Date.

A Progress Report or Final Report is due by the date noted above. The REB may ask for monitoring information at some time during the project's approval period.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. Minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered when submitted on the Request to Revise form.

Investigators must also report promptly to the REB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

Forms for submissions, notifications, or changes are available on the REB website: [www.uwindsor.ca/reb](http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb). If your data is going to be used for another project, it is necessary to submit another application to the REB.

We wish you every success in your research.

Pierre Boulos, Ph.D.  
 Chair, Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Jonathan Bayley, Education  
 Mark Curran, Research Ethics Coordinator

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.



## APPENDIX E

Office of the Research Ethics Board



Today's Date: November 30, 2009  
 Principal Investigator: Ms. Pamela Cook  
 Department/School: Education  
 REB Number: 07-009  
 Research Project Title: Student and teacher responses to non-traditional approaches within an institutionalised learning context of Belize, Central America: a critical ethnography  
 Clearance Date: January 22, 2007  
 Project End Date: December 31, 2010  
 Progress Report Due: December 31, 2009  
 Final Report Due: December 31, 2010

This is to inform you that the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board (REB), which is organized and operated according to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* and the *University of Windsor Guidelines for Research Involving Human Subjects*, has granted approval to your research project on the date noted above. This approval is valid only until the Project End Date.

A Progress Report or Final Report is due by the date noted above. The REB may ask for monitoring information at some time during the project's approval period.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. Minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered when submitted on the Request to Revise form.

Investigators must also report promptly to the REB:

- a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

Forms for submissions, notifications, or changes are available on the REB website: [www.uwindsor.ca/reb](http://www.uwindsor.ca/reb). If your data is going to be used for another project, it is necessary to submit another application to the REB.

We wish you every success in your research.

Pierre Boulos, Ph.D.  
 Chair, Research Ethics Board

cc: Dr. Kara Smith, Education  
 Mark Curran, Research Ethics Coordinator

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.





## APPENDIX F

## LETTER OF INFORMATION FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: **Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Pamela R. Cook, PhD candidate** from the Joint PhD in Education Studies at the University of Windsor; contributing to the fulfilment of the requirements for the final dissertation project.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact, advisor, Dr. Andrew Allen, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Sunset Blvd. University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, N9B 3P4. He may be contacted via e-mail [aallen@uwindsor.ca](mailto:aallen@uwindsor.ca) or telephone (519) 253-3000 ext. 3829.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the responses of students and teachers in the implementation of an institutionalised prescribed non-traditional learning environment. Further, in this thesis, I propose to reveal how students and teachers living within a small orphanage (in Ladyville, Belize, Central America), make sense of the ways in which the teaching and learning process within an institution can be operationalised within a school programme.

### PROCEDURES

A 16-week investigation will be conducted using a critical ethnographic method. If you agree to volunteer and participate in this study, I will...

- 1 Inquire, collaborate and actively participate in the classroom experiences to gain a better understanding of institutionalised learning within a developing country.
- 2 Show respect for the children and staff of Liberty Children's Home by maintaining the authenticity of conversation, dialogue, and interviews by recording and videotaping sessions with permission of Liberty Children's Home. (Feedback offered on a regular basis)
- 3 Give merit to the interpretations that reflect historical significance and value the Belizean culture.

Those who choose to volunteer (administrators, teachers, staff and children) will be interviewed and asked questions on a regular basis. Short meetings will include conversations, dialogue and discussions arranged during classroom learning activities. Group Sessions may include questions of inquiry from daily engagements and participations during learning activities regarding curricula, culture, historical perspectives with pertinent interests of the programme. This study involves open-ended questions, allowing for the richness of the culture and exchanges of the Belizean people (student and teacher) within the classroom learning experiences.

Step 1: Access to the research site to Liberty Children's Home in Ladyville, Belize, Central America

Step 2: Initial Relationship continued to be established

Step 3: Explanation to Volunteers and daily/weekly schedule review

Step 4: Data Collection

Step 5: Feedback on a daily (and or) weekly basis

Step 6: Preliminary, Mid and post report presentations

Step 7: Final Interviews, Discussions, wrap-up to leave Liberty Children's Home



## Page 2

### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study poses minimal risk to the volunteers. The study consists of recording discussions and observations between teachers and children via audio and video recordings. These activities are regular engagements and interactions that exist as part of this research setting.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO VOLUNTEERS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This project will provide an opportunity for the administrators, teachers, staff and students to articulate their learning experiences which will offer suggestions for the various layered issues that off-set the institutionalised learning context within a developing country.

### PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No payment will be given for volunteering for the research study.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only to those with permission by Liberty Children's Home. **All** research materials will be returned to the Foundation of Liberty Children's Home to use for future reference.

### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose to participate or not in this study. If you choose to volunteer your services you may withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. You may choose not to answer any questions and still remain in the study. The investigator reserves the right to ask for removal of a participant (s) from this research study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so under the discretion of Liberty Children's Home.

### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE VOLUNTEERS

Consistent feedback of this study will be available to the administrators, teachers, staff and children of Liberty Children's Home on a weekly basis. Presentations for the administration, teachers, and staff will be conducted informal meetings with dialogue and discussion. A preliminary, mid-term and final report of the experiences will be provided during the 16-week schedule. The research study will become available upon the completion of the data analysis which will be sent via mail or e-mail.

E-mail address: [cook12@uwindsor.ca](mailto:cook12@uwindsor.ca)

Date when results are available: Final completion of data, tentatively December 2007

### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

This data will be used in subsequent studies. The data from this study may constitute articles for publication and additional presentations, as well as, future research as a longitudinal case study.

### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4; telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916; e-mail: [lbunn@uwindsor.ca](mailto:lbunn@uwindsor.ca).

### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

*Pamela R. Cook*

Date: 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2007

## APPENDIX G

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH Administration

Title of Study: **Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Pamela R. Cook, PhD student** from the **Joint PhD in Educational Studies** at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. **This project fulfils the final requirements for the completion of the Dissertation.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research study, please feel to contact Dr. Andrew Allen, Assistant Professor, University of Windsor, (Sunset Blvd. Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4), e-mail, [aallen@uwindsor.ca](mailto:aallen@uwindsor.ca) or telephone (519) 253-3000 ext. 3829.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the responses of students and teachers in the implementation of an institutionalised prescribed non-traditional learning environment. Further, in this thesis, I propose to reveal how students and teachers living within a small orphanage (in Ladyville, Belize, Central America), make sense of the ways in which the teaching and learning process of an institution can be operationalised within a school programme.

### PROCEDURES

A 16-week investigation will be conducted using a critical ethnographic method. If you agree to volunteer and participate in this study, I will

- 4 Inquire, collaborate and actively participate in the classroom experiences to gain a better understanding of institutionalised learning within a developing country.
- 5 Show respect for the children and staff of Liberty Children's Home by maintaining the authenticity of conversation, dialogue, and interviews by recording and videotaping sessions with permission of Liberty Children's Home. (Feedback offered on a regular basis)
- 6 Give merit to the interpretations that reflect historical significance and value the Belizean culture.

Those who choose to volunteer (administrators, teachers, staff and children) will be interviewed and asked questions on a regular basis. Short meetings will include conversations, dialogue and discussions arranged during classroom learning activities. Group Sessions may include questions of inquiry from daily engagements and participations during learning activities regarding curricula, culture, historical perspectives with pertinent interests of the programme. This study involves open-ended questions, allowing for the richness of the culture and exchanges of the Belizean people (student and teacher) within the classroom learning experiences.

Step 1: Access to the research site to Liberty Children's Home (Orphanage)

Step 2: Initial Relationship continued to be established

Step 3: Explanation to Volunteers and daily/weekly schedule review

Step 4: Data Collection

Step 5: Feedback on a daily (and or) weekly basis

Step 6: Preliminary, Mid and post report presentations

Step 7: Final Interviews, Discussions, wrap-up to leave Liberty Children's Home

## Page 2

### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study poses minimal risk to the volunteers. The study consists of recording discussions and observations between teachers and children via audio and video recordings. These activities are regular engagements and interactions that exist as part of this research setting.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO VOLUNTEERS

This project will provide an opportunity for the administrators, teachers, staff and students to articulate their learning experiences which will offer suggestions for the various layered issues that off-set the institutionalised learning context within a developing country.

### PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No payment will be given for volunteering for the research study.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only to those with permission by Liberty Children's Home. All data will be securely locked and professionally disposed of upon completion.

### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose to participate or not in this study. If you choose to volunteer your services you may withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. You may choose not to answer any questions and still remain in the study. The investigator reserves the right to ask for removal of a participant (s) from this research study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so under the discretion of Liberty Children's Home.

### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE VOLUNTEERS

Consistent feedback of this study will be available to the administrators, teachers, staff and children of Liberty Children's Home on a weekly basis. Presentations for the administration, teachers, and staff will be conducted as informal meetings with dialogue and discussion. A preliminary, mid-term and final report of the experiences will be provided during the 16-week schedule. The research study will become available upon the completion of the data analysis which will be sent via mail or e-mail.

E-mail address: [cook12@uwindsor.ca](mailto:cook12@uwindsor.ca)

Date when results are available: Final completion of data, tentatively December 2007

### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

This data will be used in subsequent studies. The data from this study may constitute articles for publication and additional presentations, as well as, future research as a longitudinal case study.

### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916; e-mail: [lbunn@uwindsor.ca](mailto:lbunn@uwindsor.ca).

### SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study of: **Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**, as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this research study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Administrator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Administrator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct this research study.

*Pamela R. Cook, PhD candidate*

**Date:** *February 12, 2007*

## APPENDIX H

**Liberty Children's Home (LCH)/Liberty Learning Centre (LLC)**  
**Administrative Research Questions**

Administratively speaking . . .

1. in your opinion, how your role as a \_\_\_\_\_, functions within this organisational structure? (e.g. Children's Home & School)
2. how do you see yourself working in your role within the Belizean community and culture?
3. within the near future, include ways that you think will improve the children's home and school? (e.g. new employee positions, buildings, etc.)

Pedagogically speaking . . .

1. and in your opinion, what does a non-traditional learning environment mean to you?
2. and in your opinion, what are non-traditional approaches to learning?
3. within the context of institutionalisation, how do you see two non-traditional learning philosophies (e.g. Montessori & Reggio Emilia) working together within a post-colonial structured country?

Organizationally speaking . . .

1. and in your opinion, how will the organizational structure of the children's home and school coincide? (working together)
2. how do you see the children's home and school functioning within the Belizean community and culture?
3. and in your opinion, briefly discuss future goals and plans for the children's home and school?

## APPENDIX I

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

### **Teachers of Liberty Children's Home campus school**

**Title of Study: Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Pamela R. Cook, PhD student** from the **Joint PhD in Educational Studies** at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. **This project fulfils the final requirements for the completion of the Dissertation.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research study, please feel to contact Dr. Andrew Allen, Assistant Professor, University of Windsor, (Sunset Blvd. Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4), e-mail, [aallen@uwindsor.ca](mailto:aallen@uwindsor.ca) or telephone (519) 253-3000 ext. 3829.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the responses of students and teachers in the implementation of an institutionalised prescribed non-traditional learning environment. Further, in this thesis, I propose to reveal how students and teachers living within a small orphanage (in Ladyville, Belize, Central America), make sense of the ways in which the teaching and learning process of an institution can be operationalised within a school programme.

#### **PROCEDURES**

A 16-week investigation will be conducted using a critical ethnographic (question & answer method). If you agree to volunteer and participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- 7 Short 2-3 minute daily interviews between teacher and investigator on daily lessons prepared, and interacted with students (before, during or after-school).
- 8 Participation within weekly short 5-15 minute small group teacher meetings of question/answer dialogue discussions.
- 9 Participation within large group administration/teacher weekly meetings through dialogue and discussions including classroom learning activities.

Those who choose to volunteer will be interviewed and asked questions on a regularly including before, during or after-school. Small group segments ranging from 5 -15-minutes will include short conversations, dialogue and discussions to be arranged on a weekly basis. Large group weekly sessions may include inquiries from daily engagements the learning environment regarding curricula, culture, historical perspectives with pertinent interests of the programme. This study involves open-ended questions, allowing for the richness of the culture and exchanges from the Belizean peoples within an institutionalised classroom learning environment.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study poses minimal risk to the volunteers. The study consists of discussions and observations between teachers and students, on a regular basis, recorded through audio, verbal (note taking), and video. If the participant chooses not to be involved in the study, or is removed from the study, there is no penalty regarding the teacher's employment.

## Page 2

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO TEACHERS

This project will provide an opportunity for the administrators, teachers, staff and students to articulate their learning experiences which will offer suggestions for the various layered issues that off-set the institutionalised learning context within a developing country.

### PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No payment will be given for volunteering for the research study.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only to those with permission by Liberty Children's Home. All data will be securely locked and professionally disposed of upon completion of this research study.

### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose to participate or not in this study. If you choose to volunteer your services, you may withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. You may choose to not answer any questions and still remain in the study. Liberty Children's Home administration and the investigator deserve the right to remove any teacher from this study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. There will be no penalties regarding the teacher's employment.

### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE TEACHERS

Consistent feedback of this study will be available to the administrators, teachers, caregivers, staff and children of Liberty Children's Home on a weekly basis. Presentations for the administration, teachers, and staff will be conducted as informal meetings with dialogue and discussion. A preliminary, mid-term and final report of the experiences will be provided during the 16-week schedule. This research study will become available upon the completion of the data analysis which will be sent via e-mail or mail.

E-mail address: [cook12@uwindsor.ca](mailto:cook12@uwindsor.ca)

Date when results are available: Final completion of dissertation, tentatively December, 2007.

### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

This data will be used in subsequent studies. The data from this study may constitute articles for publication and additional presentations, as well as, future research as a longitudinal case study.

### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916; e-mail: lbunn@uwindsor.ca.

### SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study of: **Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**, as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this research study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct this research study.

Signature of Investigator Pamela R. Cook Date February 12, 2007

## APPENDIX J

**Liberty Learning Centre  
Teacher Questions**

1. In your opinion, what are your thoughts of a non-traditional learning environment?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In your opinion, what do you think of Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches to early learning?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. In your opinion, what do you think of an orphanage school within a structured educational system using a non-traditional learning approach to the curriculum?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. In your opinion, how can the learning improve here at Liberty Learning Centre?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges for Liberty Learning Centre?

Additional Comments:

## APPENDIX K

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

### **Staff of Liberty Children's Home**

**Title of Study: Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Pamela R. Cook, PhD student** from the **Joint PhD in Educational Studies** at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. **This project fulfils the final requirements for the completion of the Dissertation.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research study, please feel to contact Dr. Andrew Allen, Assistant Professor, University of Windsor, (Sunset Blvd. Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4), e-mail, [aallen@uwindsor.ca](mailto:aallen@uwindsor.ca) or telephone (519) 253-3000 ext. 3829.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the responses of students and teachers in the implementation of an institutionalised prescribed non-traditional learning environment. Further, in this thesis, I propose to reveal how students and teachers living within a small orphanage (in Ladyville, Belize, Central America), make sense of the ways in which the teaching and learning process of an institution can be operationalised within a school programme.

#### **PROCEDURES**

A 16-week investigation will be conducted using a critical ethnographic (question & answer method). If you agree to volunteer and participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- 4 Short 2-3 minute interviews between the staff and investigator on daily routines interacting with the students (before, during or after-school).
- 5 Participation within short 5-15 minute small group staff meetings of question/answer dialogue and discussion.
- 6 Participation within large group staff meetings through dialogue and discussions of weekly interactions with the administration, teachers, caregivers and student activities.

Those who choose to volunteer will be interviewed and asked questions on a regular basis, before, during or after-school. Small group meetings of 5 -15 minute segments will include short conversations, dialogue and discussions will also be arranged. Large group sessions may include questions of inquiry from daily engagements and participations of learning activities regarding curricula, culture, historical perspectives with pertinent interests of the programme. This study involves open-ended questions, allowing for the richness of the culture and exchanges of the Belizean peoples within an institutionalised classroom learning environment.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study poses minimal risk to the volunteers. The study consists of discussions and observations between staff members and students, on a regular basis, recorded through audio, verbal (note taking), and video. If the participants choose not to be involved in the study, or are removed from the study, there is no penalty regarding the staff member's employment



## Page 2

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO STAFF

This project will provide an opportunity for the administrators, teachers, caregivers, staff and students to articulate their learning experiences which will offer suggestions for the various layered issues that off-set the institutionalised learning context within a developing country.

### PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

No payment will be given for volunteering for the research study.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only to those with permission by Liberty Children's Home. All data will be securely locked and professionally disposed of upon completion of this research study.

### PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You may choose to participate or not in this study. If you choose to volunteer your services, you may withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. You may choose to not answer any questions and still remain in the study. Liberty Children's Home administration and the investigator deserve the right to remove any staff member from this study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. There will be no penalties regarding the staff member's employment.

### FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE VOLUNTEERS

Consistent feedback of this study will be available to the administrators, teachers, caregivers, staff and students of Liberty Children's Home on a weekly basis. Presentations for the administration, teachers, caregivers and staff will be conducted as informal meetings with dialogue and discussion. A preliminary, mid-term and final report of the experiences will be provided during the 16-week schedule. The research study will become available upon the completion of the data analysis which will be sent via e-mail or mail.

E-mail address: [cook12@uwindsor.ca](mailto:cook12@uwindsor.ca)

Date when results are available: Final completion of data, tentatively December, 2007

### SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

This data will be used in subsequent studies. The data from this study may constitute articles for publication and additional presentations, as well as, future research as a longitudinal case study.

### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916; e-mail: lbunn@uwindsor.ca.

### SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the information provided for the study of: **Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**, as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this research study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Staff member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Staff member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct this research study.

Signature of Investigator: Pamela R. Cook, Date February 12, 2007

## APPENDIX L

**Liberty Children's Home/Liberty Learning Centre  
Staff Questions**

1. As a \_\_\_\_\_ (cook, custodial, gardener, physical grounds, or secretary), how do you feel about working in and around a non-traditional learning environment?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What do you think about a children's home and school working together?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How do feel the children's home and school work well within the Belizean community and culture?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How do you feel about the learning progress of the children at Liberty?

Extra Comments:

## APPENDIX M

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

### **Caregivers of Liberty Children's Home**

**Title of Study: Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Pamela R. Cook, PhD student** from the **Joint PhD in Educational Studies** at the University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. **This project fulfils the final requirements for the completion of the Dissertation.**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research study, please feel to contact Dr. Andrew Allen, Assistant Professor, University of Windsor, (Sunset Blvd. Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4), e-mail, [aallen@uwindsor.ca](mailto:aallen@uwindsor.ca) or telephone (519) 253-3000 ext. 3829.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the responses of students and teachers in the implementation of an institutionalised prescribed non-traditional learning environment. Further, in this thesis, I propose to reveal how students and teachers living within a small orphanage (in Ladyville, Belize, Central America), make sense of the ways in which the teaching and learning process of an institution can be operationalised within a school programme.

#### **PROCEDURES**

A 16-week investigation will be conducted using a critical ethnographic (question & answer method). If you agree to volunteer and participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- 1 Short 2-3 minute interviews between caregiver and investigator on daily routines before and after-school.
- 2 Participation within short 5-15 minute small meetings of question/answer arranged dialogue and discussions.
- 3 Participation within large group caregiver meetings through dialogue and discussions includes weekly engagements with students.

Those who choose to volunteer will be interviewed and asked questions on a regular basis, before, during or after-school. Small group meetings of 5 -15 minute segments will include short conversations, dialogue and discussions will also be arranged. Large group sessions may include questions of inquiry from daily engagements and participations of learning activities regarding curricula, culture, historical perspectives with pertinent interests of the programme. This study involves open-ended questions, allowing for the richness of the culture and exchanges of the Belizean peoples within an institutionalised learning environment.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study poses minimal risk to the volunteers. The study consists of discussions and observations between caregivers and students, on a regular basis, recorded through audio, verbal (note taking), and video. If the participants choose not to be involved in the study, or are removed from the study, there is no penalty regarding the caregiver's employment.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO CAREGIVERS**

This project will provide an opportunity for the administrators, teachers, staff, caregivers and students to articulate their learning experiences which will offer suggestions for the various layered issues that off-set the institutionalised learning context within a developing country.

## Page 2

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

No payment will be given for volunteering for the research study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only to those with permission by Liberty Children's Home. All data will be securely locked and professionally disposed of upon completion of this research study.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You may choose to participate or not in this study. If you choose to volunteer your services, you may withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. You may choose to not answer any questions and still remain in the study. Liberty Children's Home administration and the investigator deserve the right to remove any caregiver from this study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. There will be no penalties regarding the caregiver's employment.

**FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE VOLUNTEERS**

Consistent feedback of this study will be available to the administrators, teachers, caregivers, staff and students of Liberty Children's Home on a weekly basis. Presentations for the administration, teachers, caregivers and staff will be conducted as informal meetings with dialogue and discussion. A preliminary, mid-term and final report of the experiences will be provided during the 16-week schedule. The research study will become available upon the completion of the data analysis which will be sent via mail or e-mail.

E-mail address: [cook12@uwindsor.ca](mailto:cook12@uwindsor.ca)

Date when results are available: Final completion of data, tentatively December, 2007

**SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA**

This data will be used in subsequent studies. The data from this study may constitute articles for publication and additional presentations, as well as, future research as a longitudinal case study.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4; telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3916; e-mail: [lbunn@uwindsor.ca](mailto:lbunn@uwindsor.ca).

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH VOLUNTEER/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**

I understand the information provided for the study of: **Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**, as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this research study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Caregiver

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Caregiver

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

These are the terms under which I will conduct this research study.

Signature of Investigator: *Pamela R. Cook*

Date: *February 12, 2007*

## APPENDIX N

**Liberty Children's Home and Liberty Learning Centre  
Caregiver Questions**

1. As a \_\_\_\_\_ (caregiver), how do you feel about working in and around a non-traditional learning environment?

2. What do you think about a children's home and school working together?

3. How do feel the children's home and school work well within the Belizean community and culture?

4. How do you feel about the learning progress of the children at Liberty?

Extra Comments:

## APPENDIX O

### Example of Conversations, Guided Children and Teacher Questions 17 - Week Schedule

An example of a typical conversation may include:

**Researcher:** (Observing a child painting) "I noticed that colour orange, tell me more?"

**Child:** "I mixed it up!"

**Researcher:** "Mixed it up!" "Please tell me more!"

**Child:** "I put red in the yellow paint and I mixed it up!" (Child shows researcher)

**Researcher to Teacher:** "Tell me more about the colours of the paint?"

**Teacher:** "The paint is made out of...and the children learn to mix colours by..."

**Researcher:** "I am interested in the colours of paint you have chosen, tell me more!"

During this particular context, painting may be an unusual type of activity for a child at the Children's Home, therefore an important piece of inquiry may result in different ways of mixing materials to create colours, mixtures and the entire painting experience.

#### Guided Children Questions

"What do you think about...?", "What can we do about...?"; "I wonder if there is another way...?"

"What is your opinion on... or of...?", "Just suppose that...then what?", "How could you...?"

"What else can we use this for...?", "Is there another way to do this...?", "Tell me more about...?"

"Why do you think this works...?", "In what ways are these different...?", "What would happen if...?"

"What could you tell me about...?", "How do you think we could...?"

"I noticed that...what can you tell me more about...?"

#### Guided Teacher Questions

"I noticed that you allow students a 'choice' during activities?", "How does that work?"

"Why do you do it that way?", "How do you feel about giving children choices?"

"What do 'structured learning activities' mean to you?"

"What do 'traditional' (unstructured) learning activities mean to you?"

"What do you enjoy best about the teaching and learning process?"

"What do you least enjoy about the teaching and learning process?"

"Tell me more about why you choose to do this activity...?"

"In the Belizean culture, what does this...mean?"

#### 17- Week Schedule

**Week 1: Introductions, tour of campus, facilities and 'Preliminary Report' as Feedback**

Week 2: Interviews, observations, before, during and after-school inquiries with Feedback

Week 3: Special meetings, dialogue and discussions with Feedback

Week 4/5: Interviews, observations, before, during and after-school inquiries with Feedback

Week 6: Special meetings, dialogue and discussions with Feedback

Week 7: Interviews, observations, before, during and after-school inquiries with Feedback

**Week 8: Interviews, discussions, presentation and 'Mid-term' Report as Feedback**

Week 9: Interviews, observations, before, during and after-school inquiries with Feedback

Week 10: Special meetings, dialogue and discussions with Feedback

Week 11/12: Interviews, observations, before, during and after-school inquiries with Feedback

Week 13: Special meetings, dialogue and discussions with Feedback

Week 14/15: Interviews, observations, before, during and after-school inquiries with Feedback

**Week 16: Final Interviews, discussions, presentation, and 'Final Report' as Feedback**

## APPENDIX P

## Student Classroom Observation and Recording Schedule

**9:00 – 10:30 am:** Free Choice Work-time (children chose their own materials to manipulate and teachers worked alone or in small groups with the children)

**10:30 – 11:00 am:** Snack and Recess Break (daily fruit snacks of bananas, mangos or papayas were often served)

**11:00 – 12:00:** Children continued working alone, with a teacher or in small groups until lunch was served.

**12:00 – 1:00pm:** Lunch Time and Recess (A typical Belizean lunch consisted of beans, chicken, rice and tortillas. In addition, fish, potato salad and a type of thick "Johnny cake" was also served. At recess, children chose to run, lie in a hammock, play kickball, ride bikes, sing under a palapa or climb the wooden climber unit that consisted of a loft, slide and swing set).

**1:00pm – 3:00pm:** Children continued work-time alone, within small groups or one-on-one with teachers.

**3:00pm:** School's dismissal (the community preschool children were collected by their parents and the preschool and school-age children that stayed at the orphanage home began chores around the campus).

**3:00pm - 4:00pm:** The school-age children of LCH cleaned and swept out the barn, collected the rubbish, and fed the animals including; ducks, chickens, horses and pigs. A few of the younger preschool children helped with chores and also played outside games with the caregivers on duty.

**4:00pm - 5:00pm:** The preschool children and school-age students engage within games of kickball, ball and parachute, as well as inside table games.

**5:00pm - 6:00pm:** Children prepare for evening meal

**6:00pm - 7:00pm:** Evening tea (dinner)

**7:00pm - 8:00pm:** Children retire to their living domes to bathe, read stories, sing or play short board games before bedtime.

\*Often on Fridays, there may be special events planned where the caregivers and staff take the children to the Princess Hotel in Belize City, the local swimming pool or other types of fieldtrips.



## APPENDIX Q

**Assent for school-aged Children (Ages 5-9)**

I am a student researcher, and I am doing a study on what you think learning is like here in Belize, Central America. I may ask you a few questions, for example...

I might say as the researcher: (Observing a child painting) "I noticed that colour orange, tell me more?"

Child: "I mixed it up!"

Researcher: "Mixed it up!" "Please, tell me more!"

Child: "I put red in the yellow paint and I mixed it up!" (Child shows researcher)

Researcher: "I am interested in the colours of paint you have chosen, tell me more!"

When I am finished talking with all who agree to be in my study, I will write a report on what I have learned. My teachers will read it, and it might be put in a book, but no one will know who the kids are that answered my questions.

I want you to know that I will not be telling your teachers or any other kids what you answer. The only exception is if you tell me that someone has been hurting you or if you think that you are being hurt or abused, I will need to tell your teachers or someone else who can help you. Otherwise, I promise to keep everything that you tell me very private.

Liberty Children's Home said that it was okay for you to answer my questions. Do you think that you would like to answer them? You will not get into any trouble if you say no. If you decide to answer the questions you can stop answering them at any time, and you do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. It is entirely up to you. Whether you decide to answer any questions or not, I will give you a small prize when you leave. Would you like to try answering the questions?

I understand what I am being asked to do to be in this study, and I agree to be in this study.

---

Child Signature

---

Date

---

Witness

## APPENDIX R

**CONSENT FOR AUDIO TAPING**

Research Volunteer Name: \_\_\_\_\_.

**Title of the Project: Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

I consent to the audio-taping during interviews, procedures, or observations.

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the taping be stopped. I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that taping will be kept confidential. Tapes are filed by number only and will be kept within a locked cabinet.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and the viewing of these materials will be for professional use only.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Administration

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Or

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher, Caregiver, Staff, Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX S

**CONSENT FOR A PHOTOGRAPH(S)**

Research Volunteer Name: \_\_\_\_\_.

**Title of the Project: Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

I consent to photography during interviews, student/interactions or observations (camera, digital camera and video).

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the photography be ceased. I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that all photos will be kept confidential. All photographs will be dated and kept in a locked cabinet during the study. Any photographs taken may be used for on-site dialogue, discussion and educational presentations. Upon completion of the dissertation, all photography will be destroyed through the University of Windsor's professional shredding company.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and the viewing of materials will be for professional use only.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Administration

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Or

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher, Caregiver, Staff, Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX T



Kensington Charity Centre, Charles House  
375 Kensington High Street, London, W14 8QH

T: 020 7341 7341  
F: 020 7341 7241

[www.libertyfoundation.org.uk](http://www.libertyfoundation.org.uk)  
[info@libertyfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@libertyfoundation.org.uk)

27 December 2006

Pamela R. Cook, PhD candidate  
University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Dear Pamela Cook:

We understand that you will need to take pictures and videotape of our students, staff, and campus in connection with your planned research here for your doctoral work titled *Student and Teacher Responses to Nontraditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Learning Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography*.

This letter is to serve as formal consent by Liberty Foundation for said pictures and videotape to be made and used solely and exclusively in support of the aforementioned thesis. This general consent shall not apply to any individual prospective participants who refuse to grant such permission on their own behalf.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the parameters of permission granted herein, please do not hesitate to contact us.

All the best,

Ambrose Lovely  
Site Manager  
Liberty Children's Home

## APPENDIX U

**CONSENT FOR VIDEO TAPING**

Research Volunteer Name: \_\_\_\_\_.

**Title of the Project: Student and Teacher Responses to Non-traditional Approaches within an Institutionalised Context of Belize, Central America: A Critical Ethnography**

I consent to the video-taping during interviews, procedures, or observations.

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the viewing be discontinued. I also understand that my name will not be revealed to anyone and that viewing will be kept confidential. Tapes are filed by number only and will be kept within a locked cabinet.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and the viewing of these materials will be for professional use only.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Administration

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Or

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher, Caregiver, Staff, Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX V

Mr. Tillett's funny stories as told the Belizean way.

Where is My Plate?

Cuate was coming down the Western Highway from buying oranges in Cayo en route to Orange Walk town where he does his retailing. He was driving approximately sixty miles per hour eating oranges giving jokes to his wife who did his peeling of oranges for him. Suddenly, Cuate said, "But eh, I feel a sudden coolness in my mouth!" His wife responded to him confusingly by saying, "You fool your top plate is missing out of your mouth and the breeze is passing through the open gate!" He didn't take his wife's word for it but put his finger in his mouth to confirm his suspicion. Sadly to say the top plate was missing and the gate was indeed open from the missing plate. Immediately all jokes and fun came to a serious search since Cuate's mouth was not wholesome again. After serious brainstorming about the missing plate Cuate realized that what happened was that it came out stuck in one of the eaten half of orange which he threw away. He turned back and searched the Highway for three hours in vain since it was never recovered. Now jokingly, Cuate has now turned in a plain face character.

Page 2

### The Deadly Bite

There were three chiclenos from the River Valley area who went to the Hill Bank area to bleed chicle (cutting the sap of the Sapodilla Tree to extract the latex). The process to extract the latex was to use huge rope to climb the tree and cut X shape in the tree bank where all X's pile down into each other where the latex is drained into a bag. When filled the bags were collected and emptied in a large pot for boiling where it gets hard and transported for processing into chewing gum. Sly John got up early one morning before the others had breakfast and started bleeding chicle. While handling his rope, he was suddenly distracted by some Howler monkeys which were in the area feeding on figs. Unfortunately, he dropped his rope instead of the tree and fell on the ground. His neighbor Thomas, who was working near him quickly came to his rescue and the snake by his feet. First thing came to his thought was that the snake had bitten Sly John who was bleeding from a wound on one of his legs. Immediately, Sly John began feeling sick and started vomiting which is a symptom of snake bite. So they immediately made a stretcher out of sticks and vine and started on a ten mile journey by foot. After a hour of walking and dehydration by his carriers, they put him down

Page 3

for a rest when Sly John confessed to Thomas that he had a five year affair with his wife. During his confession he fainted again for a short spell. So Thomas, all sorry for his dying neighbor, decided that he was going to check on the wound inflicted by the snake since it was constantly bleeding which was normal for a snake bite. Upon close observation it was revealed that Sly John was not really inflicted by the snake but by his own fallen machete. Upon hearing such information he immediately stopped feeling sick, sat up and realization hit him about his confession. Well you know that the table turned because now that Thomas knew that Sly John wasn't dying, he pulled out his machete to cut off his neck for having affair with his wife. So the dying man began running for his life not from the snake bite but from the machete of a bitter and jealous husband seeking revenge. You see your mind has to do a lot in your life because as long as he believed it was a snake bite he was dying and when he realized it wasn't he was automatically well again and could have had the energy to run from a machete (D. Tillett, personal communication, March 19, 2007).



## APPENDIX W

Additional pieces of poetry from Mr. Price's collection.

## PAMELA COOK

P: is for your Patient in every situation

A: is for your Alertness in your commitment

M: is for your Motivation to everyone you meet

E: is for your Eagerness to deliver and support

L: is for your Love to see your efforts through

A: is for your Attitude towards your every goal

C: is for your carefulness to do your very best

O: is for your Outer Presence that shine on every  
One

O: is for your Organize Methods to release that  
special gift

K: is for your kindness towards a worthy cause (G.  
Price, personal communication, April 4, 2007).

## BELIZE MY HOME MY NATIVE LAND

From the Rio Hondo to the Starstoon

From North to South and East to West

A gem I cherish and love the best

A Country I know can stand the test

## Page 2

With people who of different nation  
Marring her their final station  
With much to give and much to gain  
We have learn to ease each from other strain

Looking back to a long ago  
A battle was fought to free her so  
Men were brave to their ground  
To Rio her foes and gain her crown

Knowing her is a great deal  
Independence became her major shield  
From countries both far and near  
Whom didn't revile that others care

With tourist attraction as you know  
And divers place unlimited to go  
We sure can say without a doubt  
That Belize indeed deserves a shout

And coming now to the story end  
We sure can see a definite thread

Page 3

A country has this all  
Can proudly stand up very tall  
(G. Price, personal communication, May 30, 2007).

#### LIBERTY

When you think of the meaning  
of this tangible and blessed place  
You know without a doubt for sure  
that love abides with grace.

Their many privileged people  
who work within these walls  
That is skillful willing and able  
to take up the challenge call.

The work is hard and the leaders good  
so everyone is as helpful as they should  
With much to do and much got done  
we've turn the war into some fun.

Preschool, daycare and supervision  
is given to every child  
So when they're here for the session

Page 4

you can rest assure for that while.

Meals are served at different time  
and snack between each meal  
To regulate and teach their principal  
to relax and train the mind

Vision is no doubt true  
from the output of their dream  
And adults sometime try to comprehend  
would hold their head and scream.

So caring now to this journey end  
we sure can see Liberty Treat  
A place who can offer this all  
can proudly stand up very tall

(G. Price, personal communication, May 30, 2007).

## VITA AUCTORIS

Pamela Raylene Cook was born in Muskegon, Michigan, United States of America (USA). She graduated from Grant High School in 1977. Pamela holds two Associate of Arts degrees; the first in Biblical Studies and the other in Early Childhood Education. In addition, a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education including: Kindergarten Endorsement from Taylor University, USA. She has earned a M.Ed. in Educational Studies from Indiana Wesleyan University, USA. She has fulfilled all requirements necessary for the Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Windsor and hopes to graduate in Fall 2010.